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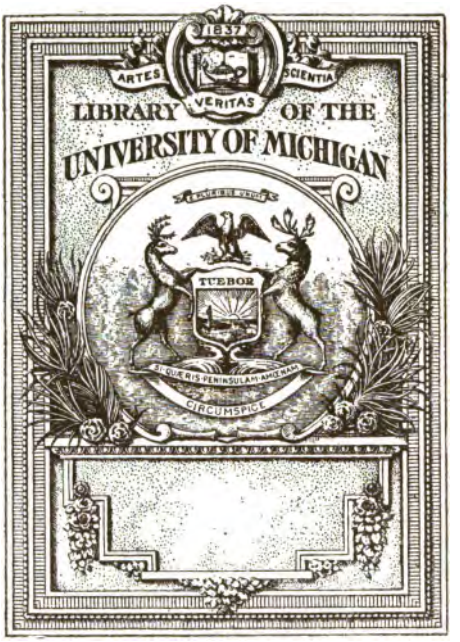
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'TWIXT CUP AND LIP

'Twixt Cup and Lip, Etc.

By

Mrs. (Lynn) Linton

Author of
"Patricia Kemball"
"Under Which Lord," etc.

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'TWIXT CUP AND LIP

CHAPTER I

THE cousins had never been really good friends. There had, of course, been the show and semblance of familiar good-fellowship, as belongs to respectable English households, but the under-current had been one of enmity and discord from the beginning; and none but themselves knew how false those smooth appearances were. They had been rivals all through. From the first day when Guy Armytage returned home from his long absence abroad, bringing his beautiful little son and that superb

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foreign wife, who held her head so high and shrank from her husband's family with what looked like such indomitable pride, to this last, when Beltrain had carried it over his cousin Lambert in the most important event of their lives, bad blood between the two boys had simmered, if not boiled over.

The very Fates seemed to have marked them out as enemies, not friends. Young Beltrain, the son of the elder brother, had all the advantages which Lambert, the son of the younger, wanted. He had beauty, grace, breeding, more than ordinary intelligence, and beyond and above all, that nameless charm which acts like a spell on men and women alike—that wonderful magnetic power which sweeps the very heart out of those who listen to that

persuading voice and look into those compelling eyes. But Lambert was heavily built in figure, and of the fair-haired, red-skinned, bull-dog type in face; a trifle boorish in manner, slow in understanding, and with that tenacity of mind which marks a certain intellectual poverty — in every way the exact contrast of his cousin, who had inherited from his Italian mother so much more than from his English father.

In worldly goods, too, Beltrain would be far better provided for than Lambert when their respective fathers should have joined the majority. To Guy, as to the elder brother, the family estate had naturally descended—as it would to Beltrain in due course of inheritance and entail—whereas, to Lambert's father had gone only

the younger son's portion, which was eked out into sufficiency by his wife's dowry. Thus Beltrain was in every way the better equipped of the two, and the rugged pride of the chauvinist English boy had to confess the supremacy of this half-foreigner with the outlandish Christian name, the dead-white skin and blue-black hair, the slim figure, small hands and feet and graceful bearing of his Southern origin—this intruder into the sturdy race of the Armytages. Intruder, for all that he was the son of the Head of the House, for was he not also the son of a heathenish Italian stranger?

First in his class at school, and the prize-winner of the year—first in the lighter exercises and athletics proper to their adolescence—though in feats of purely

muscular strength Lambert was the conqueror—first in friendship and in fortune, how should his cousin not hate this half-Italian lad? He would have been more than human else; and assuredly the humanity of Lambert Armytage was by no means of so superior a quality as this. And now, when in the last supreme contest between them Beltrain had again come off victorious—when Lambert had been refused and that other the next week accepted—the hatred which had hitherto discreetly smouldered blazed out heaven-high, and the rejected suitor of pretty Faith Morrison was at heart neither more nor less than a murderer.

Little cared the happy lovers for the dark looks and mental torments of this poor, discomfited soul. A union of perfect

suitability as it was—a love "blessed in the world's approving eyes, in friendship's smile and home's caress," they could afford the shadow of a disdained rival's bootless anger, and even hold themselves the more securely bound because of that very test of preference. Beltrain, indeed, nourished a lofty kind of pity for his rejected cousin, which, if Lambert could have read, he would have found more galling than the proudest elation.

It was hard lines for the poor beggar, thought Beltrain—compassionately for the one part, self-congratulatory for the other. To lose such a treasure as Faith, and see another succeed where he had failed—it was enough to make him savage. And savage Lambert undoubtedly was, and more intensely unpleasant than even he had ever

been before. And he knew how to make himself disagreeable, if any man did. But it was a trial for him; and to think that he, Beltrain, had won this pearl of girls—this priceless jewel—this supreme delight—to think that he had been so marvellously the blessed!

When he came to this point in his reflections, the boy's heart swelled with all a lover's glorious pride added to a man's natural self-esteem, and the earth beneath his feet was no longer solid rock and clay, but became as a golden cloud by which he was borne up to the very courts of heaven, and set among the blessed angels of God.

At the Hall, where the father and mother sat under the shade of the tulip tree on the lawn, the note was not all of joy. Loving their boy as they did, it would seem

logically certain that they should rejoice and participate in his happiness. On the contrary, they were anxious and depressed.

"It is an embarrassment," said Guy, moodily. "When we come to the settlements I shall be in a fix."

"Remember, you promised me," returned the wife.

"I have never forgotten it, *carina*," was the answer made in the caressing voice which Guy always used to his wife. No husband alive had been more tender, more careful, more loving than he.

"And never will, Guy?"

"And never will, Eufemia, *ben amata!*"

"I would die, else," she said, tears filling her beautiful dark eyes, and her rich, red lips quivering.

"There is no need for dying," returned

Guy, tenderly, but smiling as if to reassure her. "I never broke my promise yet, and I shall not begin now."

"No! you are faithful and true," said his wife.

"To you, at least," he answered, lightly outlining her face with his fingers, which then he kissed in the pretty Southern way.

"To all,' she said emphatically.

She forgot that luckless man still in the lunatic asylum at Naples. He did not; but he let the memory of it pass, and did not attempt to crystalise it in words.

"Here they come," then said Eufemia. "They must not see us looking sad."

"No, by Jove!" replied Guy.

And in a moment, as so often before, the two unburdened the thongs of that

Black Care which for so many years had ridden behind them, and flung it off as lightly as if it had been a bale of wool. All the dwellers on the slopes of a volcano seem to forget the fire under their feet, and now Eufemia's smooth, Italian face became as soft and placid as if sorrow had never touched it. Guy's keen, nervous features were full only of the joy of living, and the two happy young people, walking across the lawn to where the father and mother sat beneath the tulip tree, saw nothing but what it was intended they should see—peace, joy and love.

"Welcome, *carissima!*" said Eufemia, holding out both her hands as Faith came up. She spoke with the most caressing intonation, and her action was as caressing as her words.

"Well, dear," was Faith's not very intellectual rejoinder, as she stooped her nut-brown head and kissed the soft, white, upturned face of Beltrain's mother.

Her radiant smile made up for the commonplace of her expression, and the thrill in her voice transformed her brief monosyllable to eloquence. She was so pretty, too, that her beauty alone would have condoned a far worse fault than this of a stupid, hieroglyphic kind of greeting. Tall, well-proportioned, frank, free, and English to the backbone, she was a girl with more strength of character than intellect, pure and simple, and as free from sophistry as from affectation. She was free, indeed, from every form of humbug and superstition. She thought life eminently worth living — especially when Beltrain's

love was superadded, but she held honour as the highest thing in life, and would not have bought either safety or happiness by bartering away the smallest fringe of this supreme possession. She could be an insurgent without much difficulty, but never a traitor. She might defy authority but she would neither break faith nor betray a trust.

Her moral standpoint was as far as the poles asunder from that of Beltrain's mother, but the two were fast friends; and if Eufemia sometimes thought her future daughter-in-law romantic to a fault and independent to a folly — and Faith thought her future mother-in-law too facile for perfect testifying—their mutual as well as their common love held the balance even, and as each kept her thoughts to

herself, neither was the worse nor the wiser.

CHAPTER II

TIME flew by on golden wings, and his feet were silver-sandalled. For scythe and hour-glass he carried roses which he scattered like another Aurora by the way. No shape of grief, no shade of sorrow stole after his fleet footsteps, and neither Faith nor her young lover realised that world outside themselves — where women wept and men despaired. If a crumpled rose leaf marred the absolute smoothness of their flowery couch, it was that both father and mother did what they could to postpone the marriage. There was no

reason why, save that the *promessi sposi* were rather young. Beltrain was only twenty-three, and Faith was just four years his junior. Nineteen and twenty-three—early days wherein to begin the responsibilities of life, and take the burden of the future on one's shoulders! But, as Beltrain pleaded, they would soon overcome that defect; it mended of itself every day of their lives, and time was precious even to the young, and the days that fled could never be recalled. And, indeed, they were both very much in love, and wanted to make the future safe.

At last the boy wrung a reluctant kind of consent from his father, and as he did he wondered why it was so reluctant, and why his dear mother's

eyes filled with tears again and again as she turned them with strange beseeching to her husband. Those eyes, which were as the mirrors of her soul, asked something that the son could not understand. The husband read their hidden meaning only too well, and more than once answered in words so reassuring, so tender, so comforting, that the poor lady's troubled soul seemed for the moment to be set at rest—to wake up anew into pain and doubt at the next turn of the talk.

But Beltrain finally conquered, and an approximate date was agreed on. It was now July; somewhere about the middle of November they might think of it. These were the best terms the young lover could make, and with these both

he and Faith were forced to be content. And really, as things were, they were supremely happy; and, young as they were, they could, after all, afford to wait another four months — with Time flying by on golden wings, silver-sandalled and scattering roses by the way!

Only that sore-hearted Lambert gloomed sourly on the pretty picture made by love and youth between them—only his broad-jawed, bull-dog face took on itself the lines of moody hatred and passionate regret, while he remained there at home like one of Lucifer's fallen angels haunting the gates of Paradise, whence he was shut out. He had that irrational kind of expectation which possesses certain dogged natures. Something might turn up that would be in his favour. The

age of miracles is not yet passed for those who believe—and wait.

When the time of marriage was within measurable distance, the question of settlements arose, as of course it must. And here Mrs Morrison, as Faith's natural guardian, intervened with both authority and understanding. She was a clever woman of affairs, with that rare feminine faculty, a good head for figures. She was the widow of a stockbroker who had confided in her as to some of his business transactions, if he had kept some others secret, and who had often taken her advice when in doubt whether to sell out or hold on, whether this investment was likely to be good or that would burn his fingers. She, if anyone, knew the worth of money and the value of

stamped paper with signatures duly attested. She was alive to all the advantages of her daughter's engagement and future position. To see her, indeed, mistress of the Hall had been the dream of her life, ever since she came to Morton Moor, ten years ago. But she wanted good settlements all the same. Love is an excellent prop while it lasts, and family pride is one just as good; and an English squire is too much of a gentleman to starve and pinch his wife, nor would he leave her to beggary. All these are well-worn themes to which everyone subscribes, and he would be a rebel indeed who should gainsay them. Nevertheless, Mrs Morrison pinned her faith on the future by the solid clamp of a legal instrument endowing her daughter with so

much and so much; and she stood to her point and demanded settlements of a solid, broad and generous kind.

What she demanded Guy Armytage was not disposed to grant. The Dower House, for instance, which his brother rented—he would not hear of it! It went with the estate, he said, and must remain with the possessor. So of this farm or that—this, too, he refused peremptorily. He would not settle an acre of land—not a stick, not a stone on his son's wife; nor would he lay a charge on the estate for her benefit—no, not a farthing! He had a certain sum of money lying in shares of one kind and another—a sum which represented his savings—and that he would settle on Faith; but not a halfpenny more, come what might. In this he was resolute, and Mrs

Morrison's expostulations, pleadings, reasonings, threats, were all in vain. The billows which rage round the Armed Knight or the Gurnard's Head have just as much effect on the rocks they lash as Mrs Morrison's words had on Guy Armytage. He set his face like a flint, and not Orpheus himself could have softened him.

"I cannot understand you, Mr Armytage. I am bitterly disappointed in you," said Mrs Morrison, with extreme displeasure.

She was a sharp-nosed woman, with a shrill voice and penetrating eyes. She had once been pretty and *espiègle*. Now, her prettiness had left her, and her *espièglerie* had become shrewishness.

"I cannot understand you," she said again. "The Dower House is generally settled on the wife. It is her rightful

provision—her natural portion. It is the usual retreat for the widow, should she have the misfortune to survive her husband."

It would be Mrs Morrison's home, too, she thought — a snug, pretty, inexpensive house — free of rent and tenant's repairs. And while she fought honestly for her daughter's possible future, one of those sharp, little, brown eyes of hers was fixed on her own advantage.

"I cannot do it," said Guy Armytage.

He was quite suave and smooth, but as cold as an iceberg and as firm as one of the pyramids. Eufemia, with her pleading eyes so large and soft and full of dumb pain and beseeching, was with him. If he had had the smallest inclination to yield—which he had not—her eyes alone would have kept him steady.

"A paltry six hundred a year!" said Mrs Morrison, contemptuously. "No house—no status—no dignity! Six hundred a year! Not enough to buy her gowns and shoes."

"In a quiet country place like Morton Moor?" said the obstinate and recalcitrant master of the situation. "My wife has done on less."

"Oh! if you two have chosen to shut yourself up like mummies or hermits that is no law for my daughter. Faith and Beltrain are young; they will not consent to live—like—I don't know what!" snapped out Mrs Morrison, viciously.

"So were we once young," returned Guy.

Mrs Morrison tossed her head. In the temper in which she was, she was quite

capable of denying that proposition. Her action, indeed, did imply a certain doubt —a certain disbelief in biological laws— as if Guy Armytage and his beautiful Italian wife had been born old from the beginning.

"It is all most unsatisfactory," she then said; "but I am helpless, and must take what I can get. Faith is so bewitched. I really believe she would marry without settlements at all, and I have no power to prevent her."

"She will not do so badly for herself," said Guy Armytage, slowly. "Beltrain is a young fellow who will make his way. He is sure to succeed at the Bar, when he fairly buckles to his work."

Mrs Morrison gave him a sharp look of surprise.

"Make his way and succeed at the Bar?" she repeated. "What need is there of this? He will be the owner of the estates—what more does he want?"

"No; exactly so—no more, when he has it," said Mr Armytage, with a strange kind of smile. "But you see I am not an old man yet, and no one knows how long I may last. Don't you think it better for a young man to have something to do—something of his own to gain meanwhile, and not to be just hanging about, waiting for his father's shoes? A knowledge of the law will make him all the more valuable as a magistrate—when he does inherit."

"But the estate is not mortgaged, surely?" asked Mrs Morrison.

"Not a stick," was the emphatic answer.

"But two strings to one's bow are better than one."

"I don't see that. I don't like this doubtful tone," said Mrs Morrison, flushing. "What does it mean?"

Eufemia passed her long white hand over her forehead.

"Experience, my dear madam," said Guy, lightly. "The ways of Fortune are peculiar, and Fate's decrees are past finding out."

"It is all very mysterious," returned Mrs Morrison. "Most bitterly unsatisfactory. I am unable to cope with it. My solicitors must attend to it."

"In which case there will be no settlements at all," said Guy Armytage, as coolly as if he were announcing the hour.

"In which case there will be no marriage at all," retorted Mrs Morrison.

"As you will," he returned. "That is not my affair, but the young people's themselves. If you find them amenable, I will not be in opposition; but will you? —that is the question."

He knew she would not find them amenable. He knew that neither Beltrain nor Faith would consent to break off the marriage for the sake of settlements. To young people desperately in love the question of settlements, or, indeed, of the wherewithal to pay the butcher and the baker, is of very small importance compared with that love. A touching faith in ravens pervades their whole being; and Faith and Beltrain were no exception to the rule. Six hundred a year, and Beltrain's certain success at the Bar, with a rich father at his back to supplement

by grace what he refused to covenant by law — could the most exacting ask for more?

So it all ended as might have been foreseen from the beginning. Faith refused to stand by her mother, and professed herself more than satisfied with the provision made for her. Beltrain did not care two straws about the matter. He did not foresee his own demise before his father; and when he should come into the estate then he could make what post-nuptial settlements he liked. Meanwhile, things were all-sufficing and no fault was to be found anywhere; and poor Mrs Morrison, representing prudence and worldly wisdom, the rights of women and the independence of wives generally, was beaten at all four corners and forced to give in, more or

less ignominiously. She was very angry, somewhat suspicious, and, as she herself said, bitterly disappointed. The gilt had been taken off the gingerbread with a vengeance, and the great aim of her life had been but scurvily fulfilled. Save that the Hall, without settlements, was better than nothing, she would have forbidden the marriage there and then, and have trusted to time and the prepotency of her great god, Gold, to dry Faith's tears and incline her heart to more rational ways.

CHAPTER III

THE hunting season was in full swing. "A southerly wind and a clouded sky"

rejoiced the M.F.H. and all the hunt with the prospect of a rattling run. It was the intoxication English country gentlemen know so well, and prize even as the Chinaman prizes his precious pipe of opium which sends his soul into Elysium, and sometimes, like all things taken to excess, drags his body down to the grave. Guy Armytage was an enthusiastic sportsman, and a mighty hunter of brown beasts, sly and swift. It was all he had down here in the way of amusement; but it was enough for his soul's delight, as for the majority of his compatriots. To-day he was in more than ordinary spirits—standing there in the large square hall, booted and spurred, waiting for the horses to be brought round. Beltrain was standing near him, reading the *Times*. The mother was

by the doorway, breathing the fresh air, the softness of which belied the month in which they were.

"Here, hand that paper over," said Guy, with the masterful accent of a paterfamilias taking by right the good things to himself.

Beltrain did as he was told, and his father scanned the sheets. The money market came first, then the foreign telegrams. As he read these, he visibly changed colour, and his healthy tint became an ashen grey. He was on the Italian news, which yet had no political value — nothing to make an honest English squire, standing there in pink, ready for the hunt, lose his healthy tint and become ashen grey, like a man dying of poison.

What was it that moved him so forcibly? A dry *résumé* of an uninteresting debate

in that large House on Monte Citorio? The not very exciting fact that the Prince of Naples had shot a wild boar? This was all, save a brief romance in real life setting forth how a certain Marchese di Scalini had recovered his reason, after an incarceration of some twenty years or more in the Neapolitan Lunatic Asylum. His madness had been caused—"Our own correspondent" went on to say—by the sudden disappearance of his wife and child—an Englishman of good family being mixed up in the affair. The search instituted by the Marchese was, of course, abandoned on the lamentable outbreak of mania which followed on the tragedy, no one having the power or the inclination to proceed with the business. By the grace, however, of some new treatment the

Marchese had recovered his reason and was now at large—his mind still set on the discovery of his long lost wife and son.

When Guy Armytage read this he slightly reeled; but neither Beltrain nor his mother saw anything amiss. In a minute or two he left the hall, and when he returned he did not bring the *Times* with him.

"Where is the paper, father?" asked Beltrain. "There was no end of a queer story from Italy that I wanted to finish."

"Confound the paper," said Guy, harshly. "Here comes the horses."

He spoke with unwonted acerbity — he who in general was so gentle, so sweet-tempered, so self-controlled.

Beltrain, with that smooth Italian courtesy

which in its place and under one aspect is submission to authority and the inevitable, running like a silken thread through his nature, made no further remark, but, kissing his mother's hand, mounted his horse and rode away with his father to join the meet at Wood End. It was a point close to the Dower House, where lived that unlucky cousin, Lambert, with his father and mother.

The meet was brilliant, and the four Armytage men were well to the fore. They were all good riders, the two brothers and their sons holding their own against all comers; but, of the four, Guy was the most reckless and Beltrain had the best seat. But Lambert was a hard rider, too, and often escaped with his life by a kind of miracle not always worked for the

hard rider of a hunting field. Of late, indeed, he had seemed as if he courted danger unnecessarily, and more than one noticed how he urged on his cousin Beltrain to rash feats where the wonder was they did not both break their necks in concert. To-day, however, he was too gloomy to seem to care much about anything. It was public property that the marriage was now definitely arranged between Beltrain and Faith, and that in a fortnight's time they would be made man and wife, and the news had affected him with increased pain and anguish. This pain showed itself in dourness, in a kind of vicious sullenness, which in its essence was, as has been already said, akin to murder. And, indeed, if he could have killed Beltrain he would. He did not want to be hanged;

but if only he could put a bullet through that insolently happy heart!

He got near enough to the deed by thinking how it could be done; and all through the first part of the ride his horse's hoofs thundered out: "Kill Beltrain! Kill Beltrain!" till it seemed to him as if the whole field must have heard the echo. But how? When? Where? So easy to wish, to imagine, to plan, and so difficult to do!

It was a glorious "spin," and poor Reynard was soon despatched. Another fox was found, warier and swifter than the first. The men's blood was up; the riding was harder; the excitement greater; the intoxication more enthralling. There were a few accidents of no grave account—accidents which put the rest into good humour

with themselves and fortune—happy because of the contrast between themselves and those unlucky ones. This might be selfish, but it is the way of men in general. Riding as if for dear life, not merely for amusement, Lambert took that terrible "oxter" which so many cooler and wiser men declined. Young Beltrain followed. A lighter weight than his cousin, he went over with even better grace and a freer hand. And then Guy rushed at the terrific fence, his mind still too much perturbed by what he had seen in the *Times* to be quite free and clear. And as he went over, his horse caught his foot, and came down with a thud on the body of his unfortunate rider.

There he lay, a bruised and broken helpless mass of flesh and bone—a song that had been sung—a word that had been

spoken—a life that had been lived, and a dead body where had once been a living man. That "oxter" was his Philippi, and no spirit now could warn him to beware. The end of all things had come for him. The evil he had done was to live after him and bear fruit bitter to the end; and the good of his life would be interred with his bones. But he himself was free from all further troubles. By no coward's act, but by the mischance of fortune he had cut the Gordian knot of his difficulties, and now stood clear. What should happen to his wife and son touched him no more than it touched the panting bay, whose defective measurement of that formidable height had caused this ruin. He had done with the things of time, and not the deepest tragedy beneath the sun could move his compassion

now. All was over. Now, draw up the curtain for the next act of the drama!

This sudden death of his uncle affected Lambert as it affected no one else. Though it would naturally delay the marriage, it put Beltrain into absolute possession, and so far consolidated what had to be done, sooner or later. "Kill Beltrain—kill Beltrain," rang out his horse's hoofs as he pounded along the road, riding back to the Dower House to tell his mother of Guy's broken neck—his father having gone with Beltrain and the poor dead body to the Hall.

Riding along by those old disused mines of diabolical suggestiveness and evil reputation, Lambert came suddenly on Faith Morrison. She was walking quietly among those infernal shafts where death lurked

like a crouching tiger at the bottom, and that slight push over into his jaws was so easy. Suddenly Lambert's eyes "saw blood." All his rage against Beltrain turned and concentrated itself on Faith. Her death would be a vengeance even deeper, more pungent, more appropriate than his. He did not want the estate. No thought of gain mingled with this mad desire for vengeance—for the hindrance of this criminal happiness — criminal because bought at the expense of his own. It was to prevent this that he would steep his hands in murder — not that he might be ultimately master of the land. Of that he would have been ashamed—of this he was not ashamed.

He rode up to her with a brutal kind of haste. She looked at him with surprise as

he flung himself from his horse, his florid face flushed from brow to chin, his bloodshot eyes glaring beneath the overhanging brows. But in spite of the surprise that came into her face, how bright it was!—how eloquent of happiness!—and how that marvellous light of love and hope illumined it as though it had been the face of an angel!

"What are you doing here?" he said harshly. "This is no place for you, Faith."

"Why not?" she answered, edging a little away from Beltrain's cousin, and edging nearer to the mouth of the pit.

"It is too dangerous," he said in the same harsh, threatening way.

"Dangerous!" she repeated; "why dangerous?"

"Those pits," he said. He spoke with

difficulty, his tongue seeming to cleave to the roof of his mouth.

The ferocity of his manner, the angry gleam in his eyes, enlightened her as to his thought.

"I am not afraid," she answered steadily, her eyes meeting his.

He made a step nearer to her. What if he backed his horse against her? His hands would be clean then. He would not have done it directly—only indirectly—which would save his conscience so far. One moment, and all would be over. She would have fallen — he would not have flung her; one moment and his vengeance would be complete. Nearer and nearer he came, and when she made an effort to step farther from the edge he prevented her.

"Draw your horse away," she said quite calmly, as if unmoved, unconscious, and in no danger whatever; "you are pushing me too near the edge."

"Will you reconsider your decision? Will you relent to me?" said Lambert. "Is not an honest Englishman better than that half-foreigner—that mongrel—neither one thing nor the other?"

She flushed angrily. "You must not speak of Beltrain like that to me," she said hastily, holding her head high and her body erect. "I love him—how can I marry you or anyone else?"

He put one hand on her shoulder—his other was on the bridle of his horse, close to his mouth. The slightest push—she was so near the edge, she must of necessity fall over.

She knew all that was passing in his mind, but she stood her ground, showing no fear, making no appeal.

"It will make you no happier," she merely said, answering his murderous thought.

Her low, calm voice seemed to go up to the very heavens. It filled all space, and seemed to Lambert as if the whole world must hear it.

He looked at her right square between the eyes, lashing himself to wrath. Those beautiful eyes! Dilated, fixed, with just the faint aura of tears in them — they would have gained mercy from a savage. Lambert's own dropped beneath them. Then suddenly turning away, he leaned his face against his horse's neck, and sobbed like a weary child. The danger was past, and she was safe.

She went near to him, and in her turn laid her hand on his shoulder.

"Do not fret like this, Lambert," she said gently. "You will find someone better suited to you than I should have been. You are young, and all life is before you."

He made no answer, but lifting his disordered face, tear-dimmed and convulsed, he took her hand and carried it to his lips. Then, mounting his horse, he rode off and left the girl once more alone, and ignorant of the great change that had come into her life and circumstances.

CHAPTER IV

ALL things were in confusion. The marriage was, of course, postponed. The sad dirge

of death had to be sung in place of those "molten-golden" notes of the tuneful wedding-bells. Business had to be attended to, as well as the more purely loving duties; and to make things sadder still, Eufemia fell gravely ill.

This, indeed, might have been expected. Her husband had been all in all to her. Heart, soul, life, hope and love were bound up with him. With him, too, rested all her sense of security, or rather of protection in a position essentially insecure. When he went her sun was eclipsed, her staff was broken, her defence-work was thrown down, and the wolves were free to range through temple and garden alike. No wonder she fell sick, poor lady! No wonder she almost died, and that she wished to die!

Meantime, a certain change took place in Lambert. When that fierce paroxysm of despair had passed—that outbreak of murderous sorrow — he was both terrified and afraid of himself. That he should have been so near the crime of crimes—that he should have ever contemplated the destruction of the one he loved better than his life — terrified him as a sleeper, suddenly awakened, still trembles because of his dream. And, willing to hold himself in hand and to withdraw himself from temptation, he did so far violence to his national prejudices as to undertake what was once the grand, and is now the small and ordinary tour. He went to Italy — going by sea to Naples, as the breeziest and most English method. And when he landed at Naples he saw neither

charm nor beauty in it, and thought the whole thing confoundedly over-rated. The weather was bad; he was listless and dispirited — haunted by sad thoughts and bitter ones; and emphatically in a mood when the things of life had ceased to charm.

Grumbling, carping, discontented, angular, his frank want of appreciation of all that beauty and colour and artistry and suggestion which make others rave with more or less sincerity of enthusiasm, caught the mocking fancy of his *table-d'hôte* companion. This was a smooth-shaven, astute, Voltairean old lawyer, who had seen so much of men's manners as to have neither repulsion nor admiration left for any vice or any virtue. He averaged all things, and found the sum a pretty constant quantity at the end.

Amused by Lambert's growlings, he talked to him a good deal, and drew him out as cleverly as a blackbird does a worm; so that the two became in a manner friends, and a certain kind of confidence grew up between them—a confidence which extended to the interchange of names and cards. When Lambert gave his to the old lawyer, a sudden change came over the astute, fox-like face, that showed itself even to the young man, by no means observant or sharp-sighted.

"Armytage?" he said. "A droll coincidence."

"As how?" asked Lambert.

"I am looking for an Armytage," was the answer. "Guy Armytage."

"That was my uncle's name," said Lambert. "He has just died—broke his

neck in the hunting-field about six weeks ago."

"The usual end of fox-hunters," returned the lawyer, tranquilly. "Left a family?"

"One son and a wife."

"English wife?"

"No, Italian. My cousin Beltrain, too, is half Italian."

"Ah! so Beltrain is his name? That is not an English name."

"No, but then Mrs Armytage is Italian, as I tell you. Her name is Eufemia."

"By Jove!" said Mr Miltown. "And so Guy Armytage is dead?"

"Yes."

"And his widow and son live?—where?"

"At the Hall, Morton Moor — the old family estate."

"Which the son, this Beltrain, has inherited?"

"Yes, and which, if he were out of the way, I should inherit, after my father," said Lambert, with a bitter smile, trying to be jocose—and failing.

Mr Miltown stroked his chin, looking at the young man with a curious expression; but no more was said at the time, and the conversation drifted on to other topics, Mr Miltown making careful notes of all that he had heard.

These notes he carried next day to a certain house on the Chiaja, where the lately-restored Marchese di Scalini lived. And when he read them out he ran the risk of undoing all the good that had been done by the new treatment, and was within an ace of throwing the un-

happy gentleman back to his destroyed condition.

The excitement almost killed him. To have had that one thought for ever dominating his life and filling his brain—through all his madness to be possessed with this and this only—in his restoration to sanity, to turn to the active pursuit of the shadow that had darkened his life, and now to have come up with it—to find it no longer a shadow, but a living thing—to have at last touched the end and aim of his sad existence, and to have vengeance in his hand;—it was a trial to the weak mind and feeble health of the Marchese, and it would have been small wonder had he fallen and failed under it. But he did not. On the contrary, after a brief moment of intense physical collapse, the

news seemed to brace and strengthen him, and to make his mind healthier, because more purposeful.

And on one thing he was resolved. He would go to England, confront his wife, claim his son, and at least save this great gift of God from the fire which had consumed all his other treasures of life. On this he was resolved; and no arguments that Mr Miltown could use could turn him aside from his desire. He, the lawyer, Lambert, and an Italian man of business would all go now to England and Morton Moor, where—God defend the right!

CHAPTER V

BELTRAIN was rapidly settling himself in his place. His father's affairs had been left

in perfect order, and to take over the estate and enter into possession of all that was now his had been tolerably easy. The will, too, had been simple, if a trifle strange. Every stick and stone of personal property had been left absolutely to the boy, with a recommendation, scarce needed, to take care of his mother. No charge had been left on the estate—no special legacy or bequest to the woman he had loved, and who had loved him so well. But Beltrain was to be trusted with all, because, as Guy knew, he was worthy of all trust. And his mother said she was content that things should be as they were. Her husband had explained them not a year ago, when he had re-made his will; and she understood the reasons which the world did not understand. All this she

said in her sweet, gentle, Italian way, accepting things as they came, whether they were good or ill, as of the ordering of a supreme Fate over which prayer or remonstrance would have no effect.

Mother and son were sitting in the chill sorrow of a winter's day—he in his father's place at the desk on the broad library table, looking over leases and business documents, she by the fire, as she used to sit when her beloved was alive, making some futile pretence at industry, which barely occupied her fingers while leaving her mind free to wander among the graves —where it always wandered now. The door-bell rang; strange voices sounded in the hall; the noise of many feet was heard; and the servant, throwing open the library door, announced in the formal English

manner of indifference and placid acquiescence in a marvel, "Il Marchese di Scalini."

Then the four men came into the room, and Eufemia stood face to face with the husband she had left more than twenty years ago — for the sake of her English lover abandoning home, honour, duty, religion — for the sake of love, defying God.

"At last, traitress. Shameless! oh, most faithless among women!" said the Marchese, speaking in Italian and throwing up his hands to heaven.

With a cry Eufemia covered her face and cowered together in her chair. It was the instinctive action of a creature seeking to hide itself from its pursuers.

Beltrain stood between her and their intruders.

"What does all this mean?" he asked, turning to the strangers and speaking excitedly. "Mother, who is this man?"

At his voice the Marchese opened his arms.

"My son!" he said. "My son! Leave that infamous woman who is not worthy to be your mother! Come to my heart, my son—my dear, dear son! Come to your father's embrace!"

"Are you mad, or am I?" exclaimed poor Beltrain in a bewildered kind of way. "Who are you, sir? What do you want here?"

"To expose her and to claim you," returned the Marchese. "God has forestalled my vengeance on that base man who was

my friend. Let him lie where he has fallen. But you must wash your hands clear of all this mud and mire. You must come back to me and Italy—to your home and your name. Come!"

"Tell me what it all means. Oh, Lambert, you are there!—for God's sake explain things to me."

"They are plain enough," said Lambert, brutally. "You are not my uncle's son, but the Marchese's. The Marchese di Scalina—he is your father. Your mother was not my uncle's wife, and her name is no more Armytage than yours. You are neither English nor an Armytage, nor the heir of this estate. You are an interloper all round."

And as he said this Lambert felt he was indemnified for all that he had suffered,

and that his vengeance, too, was almost fully satisfied.

"You are my son," shouted the Marchese. "You are my heir, and shall bear my name —not that tainted one you have now."

"Mother!" cried Beltrain, turning to his mother, who was still sitting by the fire, pale, mute, crushed into a heap together, as if suddenly congealed to ice or struck to stone.

The horror of the moment was almost more than she could bear, as it was greatly more than he could understand. She was crushed under the weight of pain, and too much stunned to feel acutely.

Her son's appeal roused her into activity. All the sick loathing and mad passion of the past came back to her mind. All the long years of mingled dread and love—of

fear and yet reliance that had been her life, repeated themselves in one swift flash in her memory. She had to be loyal to the dead—faithful to the truth—repellant to this man whom she had never loved. She rose from her place, and went over to her son. Moving more quickly than was her wont, and with a harder, wilder, more passionate look than her gentle face generally wore, she put her arms round the boy as though to shield him—or to hold him.

"I may be your wife," she said to the Marchese, in a voice that penetrated to the farthest recesses of the room, "but Beltrain is not your son. His father was Guy Armytage, not you."

CHAPTER VI

NEVER had there been a more complete exemplification of the old proverb. The slips between the cup and the lip had been indeed notable, and as terrible as they were strange and unexpected. The marriage that had been so near was now postponed to that indefinite time which may mean for ever. The social status that had been so good, so solid, so sufficing, was shattered to pieces like a crystal ball. The love and honour that had been so flawless were now strained and warped. His life a sham, his name indefinite, his whole condition both fraudulent and uncertain — these were the slips to poor Beltrain. While to the Marchese was the

loss of the one great hope which had illumined the darkest hours of his enduring agony, and helped him to live. In following the shadow he had lost the substance. His vengeance was a cloud dissipated into space — and his son had never lived. Yes, indeed, those slips were many and terrible, as has been said!

To Beltrain there was but one course open—he must take care of his mother first of all things, and offer back her freedom to Faith. Things were all so different now with him—he felt that the girl must have her choice unfettered, and that he could not ask to hold her by the old conditions. But Faith was no more inclined to give up her love now, than she was when all was gold and rose-colour. It was Beltrain's self she loved, not the

park and gardens, rooms and furniture of the Hall; and poverty with Beltrain was better to her mind than wealth without him. So that when he came to give her back her freedom, she refused to take it, and looking into his face said tenderly, "Only your own desire, Beltrain, can break our engagement. If you wish it broken, of course; but for my sake, no!—indeed, no!"

"You are an angel," said Beltrain, simply.

He felt as if he had poured out his whole soul in that one word. He could say no more, for indeed no more was to be said.

Naturally, the mother did not see things in the same light as "the love-sick girl," as she contemptuously phrased it. To her, money and social status were the Alpha

and Omega of happiness, and if love could be thrown in as an extra, so much the better for all concerned. If it could not, the main facts still held good, and the temple stood four-square, unshaken and undisturbed. Her dream for Faith had been, not Beltrain Armytage, but the Hall and all that this included. Beltrain, by himself, counted nothing. He was the cipher to which the rest alone gave value. When, therefore, the wreck of his fortune had come, and he stood in the world denuded of all his former possessions, then, to her mind, the whole thing was at an end, and Faith was not only permitted but morally forced to be free.

"The engagement is at an end — of course it is at an end," said Mrs Morrison, sharply, to the two young lovers, on whose

sad parting she intruded with cruel brusqueness.

"No, mother, I am still engaged," said Faith. "I will never break with Beltrain unless he himself wishes it."

"And I could only wish it if I went mad and did not know what I was doing," he said warmly.

"Rubbish! Sentimental nonsense!" retorted Mrs Morrison. "I forbid you, Faith, to encourage such stupidities. As a sensible girl you are bound to consider consequences. You shall not marry Beltrain! I am your mother, and forbid it."

"I shall never marry anybody else," said Faith, very firmly, but not disrespectfully.

"We shall see," said the mother, a little grimly. "At all events, you shall not marry him."

But the two young people knew better —or thought they did. They thought they could trust each other through silence, separation, time and distance. They thought that they would never be doubtful one of the other, and that if they waited all their lives they would wait in hope and patience and undiminished love. Whatever else was snatched from them, the cup of love and mutual trust should never fail their lips.

On this they parted, and on this they lived, and Mrs Morrison took care they should have nothing else to support them. No letters were allowed to pass, and Faith was too high-minded to condescend to deceit even for this great gain. No word ever came to her from Beltrain, nor from her to him; yet they heard sometimes of

each other—Beltrain writing to Mrs Lawrence, the clergyman's wife, at Morton Moor, and she, a good kind soul who sympathised with love's young dream, both giving news of Faith in her answers and telling Faith what she knew of Beltrain.

Meantime, Lambert never ceased to urge his own suit, which Mrs Morrison never ceased to "back." The Armytages lived now at the Hall, and the Dower House was empty. It would be a sweet place for Faith, exactly suited to her, thought her mother; and after the father's death, when the young people would migrate to the Hall, it would be a charming retreat for herself. It would fulfil all her desires and realise her old dream to the echo. And in truth, although there was no dan-

ger of her own yielding, the toils closed daily more and more round Faith, and had it been in the wilder times of individual will and disrespect for the law, she would long ago have been carried off and married by force — her mother consenting to her lover's brutality. As it was, the spirit of the age as yet had just too much hold over them for that; but Faith was daily becoming less safe; and so she felt. She remembered that terrible day by the pits, and kept much at home in the garden, where Lambert dared not molest her.

Still, things were growing more and more intense, and more and more difficult, and the strain was increasing. Both mother and lover were losing patience, and Faith knew, by that second sense we call presentiment, that a catastrophe was at hand.

In the midst of this dumb, unspoken plot, the *Times* recorded the death of "Eufemia, mother of Beltrain Armytage."

CHAPTER VII

THAT announcement was as a spur pricking the sides of Lambert's fell designs; and with this notification of Beltrain's release from his strongest tie and most important duty things became even worse and worse for Faith. Between Lambert's brutality of intention and Mrs Morrison's criminal passivity, which was as potent as so much active encouragement, the poor girl's position was now both painful and perilous; and at any time some dire catastrophe might be expected.

Warned by more signs than one, Faith never now ventured beyond the garden, where she was so far safe in that the windows of the house commanded the whole space, and Lambert could scarcely take her off before the eyes of the servants and against the sure assistance of the gardeners. The men were devoted to their young mistress, and had been warm sympathisers on Beltrain's side while as warm opponents to Lambert, whom they hated for Faith's sake, and feared also for her sake. On Sunday, too, to and from church she was safe; and she did not dread a night attack with an abductor for a burglar. But — there was always the chance of that revolver handy, and a bullet lodged in her heart in default of a wedding-ring on her finger!

If only she could communicate with Beltrain! All would then be well. She had the loving woman's supreme reliance on her beloved, and credited him with the powers of a mythic sungod, and the virtues of a folk-lore hero. But how could she write? Her mother would intercept the letter, and even at this terrible pass she could not stoop to intrigue. But if only she could write to Beltrain and tell him in what straits she was!

As if her secret prayer had been answered, one day Mrs Lawrence came hurriedly to the house while Mrs Morrison was out. Faith had steadfastly refused to accompany her mother to-day in her walk, and had been soundly trounced for her undutifulness in return. But when one's

foes are those of one's own household, it behoves one to be wary, and as steadfast as wary. Hence Faith, for all her natural sweetness and sense of duty had set her face like a flint, and the more her mother had insisted the more determinedly she had refused. She had had her "presentiments" even more vivid and more potent than ever — and who shall say she was wrong? Not the unseen witness of that stormy interview in the lane, with Lambert furious and Mrs Morrison apologetic, and Beltrain walking rapidly through the wood from the station, hearing and knowing all. Quick as light he ran along the glade, and in less time than it seemed probable that he could have covered the ground found himself at the Vicarage. He thought it

safer and better for Faith that he should go there rather than to her own house—that he should take counsel with Mrs Lawrence, who knew better than he how things were, before putting any plan of his own into execution.

Rumours of Lambert's design to carry Faith off and marry her against her will, had begun to stir the air at Morton Moor; and what Beltrain told her seemed to Mrs Lawrence as a thing she already knew—a thing which must, however, be met at once and frustrated while yet there was time. Not a moment was to be lost. If Faith was to be saved and the future redeemed from unutterable misery, this very night must see the way of safety gained—another twenty-four hours might be too late.

"Let us go now at once," said Beltrain, feverishly. "No one knows what may happen meantime! Let us go and save her."

"No, not you," Mrs Lawrence said sagely. "If you come I will stay away. You must not be seen—just yet. Wait here in peace till I come back, and write what you like to Faith. She will have the note all right."

In her heart the dear woman, who had not outlived her romance, hoped that Beltrain would write — what he did. That was the only way in which matters could be safely arranged. Once under his protection Faith would be secure; and Lambert might cool his burnt fingers in the best way he could. The end must be as sweet as the beginning had been

before that bitter middle term had come in between.

Faith was in the garden, as usual, but, with a strange dread of possible danger, keeping close to the house and near the sturdy gardener, whose fork and spade would have made short work of any assailant. As she heard the step of the Vicar's kindly wife on the gravel, she started up as one ready to defend herself, and Moss, the man, stood instinctively at attention. Nothing could have shown more clearly the haunting fear by which she was possessed.

In a rapid whisper, time being precious, Mrs Lawrence said in her ear,—

"Don't start or speak; Beltrain is at the Vicarage, and has sent you this."

She slipped the note into the girl's hand,

and Faith had just time to read it before her mother came hurriedly on the lawn. Lambert was a few hundred yards away, with that fatal carriage in waiting, and his man-servant ready to help if Miss Morrison objected to the drive which he wished her and her mother to take.

"It is ridiculous in you, Faith, to keep for ever like this in the garden," said Mrs Morrison, sharply. "I insist that you come out now for a walk with me. I cannot allow this kind of thing to go on. I have come back on purpose for you."

"I cannot go, mother," said Faith, firmly; "and I will not," she added, that note in her pocket emphasising her recalcitrant resolve.

"Perhaps she is best in the garden today," said Mrs Lawrence, gently, feeling an

awful hypocrite on one side, if a righteous champion on the other.

"She takes no exercise at all," said Mrs Morrison, in the same sharp way. "She is losing both health and looks, and I must put my foot down. I must be obeyed. So go and dress yourself for a walk with me, Faith. One would think you were afraid of something!" she added, with a short, unpleasant laugh.

"No, mother, I will not," was the answer. "Why do you so specially want me to go for a walk with you to-day?"

"And why do you so specially not want to go?" returned the mother.

"I am not inclined," said Faith.

"And I am determined," said the mother.

But, argue and fence as they would, the resistance of the girl won the day, and the

insistence of the mother won nothing; and for the second time to-day Mrs Morrison was discomfited, and Lambert had to chew the bitter cud of disappointment.

"To-morrow," he said with an oath. "It shall be to-morrow; else I will kill her!"

Ah, that to-morrow of baffled Hope!—how often it never comes! For, meantime, in this moonlight night of the sweet, warm month of June, Faith heard a light step on the gravel, and a well-known voice softly calling her by her name. The muslin curtains were gently waving before the open window, and, full of all love's tender hope and radiant joy, she drew them aside, and stepped out on to the balcony.

"Faith!" said the dear voice. "Are you ready? Will you come to me?"

She leaned over the bar, beautiful as the

Blessed Damosel—pure and loving as one of those white-winged angels to whom Beltrain had once likened her.

"Yes," she said. "You have come in ime. Love. My love and my deliverer!"

Softly she came down the stairs, her feet falling like snow-flakes on the steps; softly she went through the noiselessly opened door on to the lawn where her young lover stood; and softly, hand in hand, they passed into the safety of the perfumed night, their sorrows left behind them, and the wine-cup of love's delight fairly at their lips.

And it was Lambert now who knew the anguish of the "slip," and Mrs Morrison whose hopes of settlement and the Dower House were for ever destroyed.

THE HERMIT OF LONE HEAD

LOVE was too strong for prudence. The young couple took the bit between their sharp white teeth and bolted, traces flying and reins lying loose on their necks, as sometimes happens when Hope is of sturdier growth than Caution, and trust in good luck overshadows the wiser provisions of possible disaster.

Youth and love together make such a mighty force, no wonder if poor Prudence, with her slower step, gets distanced! — if Caution with his colder blood is swept away in the seething torrent of hope and trust! So was it with Herbert Pentreath

and Marjorie Hoyte. They were in love; and for all that she had no fortune at all, and his wonderful income, inherited from his grandmother, came to just one hundred and twenty pounds a year, they took the law into their own hands and eloped—more like a couple of truant school children, wanting to see what chances awaited them in the big fair without the gates, than two thoughtful and reasonable beings undertaking the grave responsibilities of life, and resolute to do the best they could for themselves and others.

To youth and love one hundred and twenty pounds a year are riches. Down in the country two pounds a week will go farther than four times that sum in a town. Accordingly, the newly-wedded pair sought out a safe retreat which fathers

would not discover and where mothers would not come—where the lark and the linnet would drown the small whispers of conscience and the nightingale would be a sweeter voice to which to listen than the hoarse tones of anger here, the shriller accents of chiding there.

They found all they wanted in a queer little back-water kind of place called Lone Head, where shillings had the value of crowns elsewhere, and where a policeman was as rare a visitant as a Colonial Governor or a Field-Marshal. The only creature about the place who could be called educated, or who could lay claim to the outer semblance of gentlehood—and a very poor semblance at the best!—was the perpetual curate, Mr Morley. And he did not live here, but came over from the next

parish, some five miles away, on the Sunday, for his one service, and on those rare occasions when he was wanted on week-days.

There was no house indeed at Lone Head fit for a man with seven small children and a sickly wife. There were only cottages hereabouts, the best of which the young couple had secured for a rent so small as to leave them a handsome margin for food out of their weekly two pounds. But though love and youth and the need of keeping dark made the retired lady's maid's little house available for the nonce, it would have been impossible for the perpetual curate and his olive branches—as impossible as any other hereaway. Hence, there was not a soul with whom the runaways could associate, or who were likely to betray them to the authorities.

All country places have their local oddities and "queer customers"—and Lone Head had its supply with the rest. Deep in the heart of Dead-Man's Woods lived a man known by the name of the Hermit. Who he was and whence he came no one of the little community knew. All that the oldest inhabitant could say was that, nigh hand upon twenty years agone—to be exact, it was just nineteen come Martinmas—a strange gentleman had come and built his self a small house somewheres there in the middle of Dead-Man's Woods—those woods which were said to be held up in a Chancery suit, and which therefore no one looked after and no one cared to preserve or protect. He was a wild-looking gentleman, with a dour manner and a temper to make the fur and feathers fly

when crossed. And it was as easy to cross him as to say "good day."

How he lived and what he did with hisself all the long winter months when he was snowed up, and when he was almost drowned out with the thaw and the rains, no one could tell, and all took care not to inquire. He seldom came to the town, as the Lone Headers called their miserable little starveling of a hamlet; and only when he wanted a sack of meal or a load of potatoes, which he himself wheeled off on his own barrow, not suffering man or boy to go with him.

He kept a big dog to frighten away the children; and he had a pig and a matter of poultry, which no doubt gave him a good meal by nows and thens; and there were rabbits galore in the woods, that the

hound by all accounts made free with, no one objecting, and—here the speaker would lower his voice—they did say that lambs and even sheep be sometimes amissing, and they did lay the blame of that on the Hermit and yon beast of his—more like a wolf than an honest man's house-dog, as he was.

All of which lent a flavour of romance to the place which was not without its charm to the young runaways. For even love has to be supplemented with a little dash of external life, and a diet of kisses only is apt to pall on the most robust as well as the most restricted moral and intellectual appetite. Wherefore, when Herbert and Marjorie heard of this recluse, round whose mysterious personality had by now gathered all sorts of terrifying myths, they desired

above all things to see him with their own eyes, and to judge how far the weird suspicions which had been set afloat were justified by facts.

No one knew the exact path to the Hermit's hut. Many narrow lines ran through and through the woods, and the growl of the dog or his bark showed nothing definite. Indeed, for the matter of that, the beast seemed to be ubiquitous and everywhere at once. Hence, though the young people quartered the wood in every direction, wandering at their own sweet will about and around, athwart and by zig-zags, they never struck the right way; and by degrees the current superstition of the place made its natural impression on Marjorie, so that she too began to think the wood was bewitched

and the Hermit was neither more nor less than one of Satan's subjects from below—perhaps disgraced for the immediate moment—perhaps sent as an emissary to do harm to men. Though, indeed, what harm this surly old recluse had done would have puzzled a wiser than curly-pated Marjorie to discern.

One day—that inevitable one day which comes alike in stories and in human life—the thing so long desired came, as it was bound to do. In the jocund autumn season even superstitious fear gave way before the joy of nutting in the accursed Dead-Man's Woods. For all that the Hermit had in a manner made them his own, and put a scare, as it had been a ring-fence, about them, both Herbert and Marjorie were still young enough—little more than

boy and girl as they were—to enjoy the fun as well as the best. By which it came about that, rambling here and halting there, filling pockets and baskets as they went, they came plumb upon a wattled hut, looking more like a magnified beehive than a human habitation.

At the entrance to this strange place sat a queerly-dressed Robinson Crusoe sort of man, with a flock of wild birds about and around him—birds from the woods as tame to him as are the pigeons in the piazza of St Mark's to the accustomed visitor. Presently a huge, shaggy wolf-hound came crashing out of the thicket. He stood as it were at gaze, his fangs bared, and uttering a low and angry growl. The man looked up from under his pent-house brows, and scowled. But he laid his hand on the

dog's head, and said in a voice not very unlike that growl, humanised, "Lie down, Demon! Quiet!"

Then he looked again at the two standing in the archway of the little clearing that had been made about the hut, and shouted as if they were deaf, and he was in a towering, rage, "What the devil are you doing here? Who sent you to pry on me, hey?"

Before her husband could speak, said Marjorie in her pretty way, "We have been nutting and have lost ourselves. We came here by the merest chance."

It was the unconscious coquetry of her young womanhood, averting wrath by the cajolery of beauty and the submissiveness of youth.

"No one sent us to pry. Who should?

And why?" flashed out Herbert, as his more masculine disclaimer, and speaking with a certain boyish heat and pride not unbecoming.

But the Hermit was too sour and sore, and too much accustomed to the dangerous peace of isolation, to see any beauty whatsoever in opposition. If Marjorie's sweetness in a manner disarmed him, Herbert's raised crest and puffed-out feathers set all his own bristles on end.

"I don't believe you," he shouted out angrily. "If I were to say that to Demon here, he'd soon make short work of you both. He'd tear you limb from limb before you could wink."

Here the brute growled and bared his sharp, white, cruel fangs as before.

"We are sorry to have disturbed you,"

said Marjorie, gently. "It was quite by accident, believe me."

As she stood there in the archway made by the interlacing branches, the mellow autumn sun falling on her fresh young face and golden curling hair, flecking the light blue dress she wore with little islands of golden green, she looked like some Lady of the Woods, some sweet spirit which had taken this gracious human shape to bless the eyes of man with the absolute perfection of beauty. Half crazed as he was, for ever conscious of that dark secret in the past, brutalised by solitude, secret passion, a tortured conscience and a haunting fear, the Hermit was yet a man like any other. And the sight of this fair young face, and the sound of this clear young voice, stirred him as nothing had done for

more years now than he cared to count.

She came, too, with a certain strange suggestion of, rather than likeness to, something in the far past. At the first he could not localise his memory. It was as of some shadow loveliness, subtle and undetermined —an echo of some melody sighing in the distance. Then by degrees the blurred mirror cleared itself, and the indefinite became sharply marked.

He knew of whom this fair girl reminded him, and at that first rush of memory he covered his swart face in his hands and groaned aloud. To her he felt humanely; but that youth by her side, who was he? What right had he to come to spy into the mystery of the past? Was he the resurrection of his old enemy? Was

he never to be free from that devil still haunting his soul? And yet—the boy did not look like that hated man. She did throw back to the lost and blood-stained past; but he was of a different stamp, yet something familiar too. But whoever they were, these rash children who had ventured on his solitude and braved the foul fiend by which he was possessed, they must learn to avoid him as they would avoid death and destruction, for indeed it would be both death and destruction to venture here again. The knowledge of the way to his retreat, which they had gained, they must neither utilise nor impart, else would Demon teach them how to rue their rashness—while leaving him free from the charge of murder.

"Be off!" shouted the Hermit, roused

to sudden fury by the thoughts that surged through his brain as though they were infernal millraces; "and never you dare to come here again. Be thankful you have escaped so far. Another time, and my dog shall be at your throats. He knows how to tear out the life from a lamb's throat!" he added, with a horrible laugh, worse to hear than an angry oath.

"Good-bye," said Marjorie. "I am so sorry we have vexed you."

"Good-day," said Herbert, following her lead.

The Hermit made a gesture of repulsion, letting fly a flock of blasphemies and curses, like a nest of foul birds aroused by a tempest.

"Out of my sight!" he shouted. Then, as they turned to go, he called after

them, "Stay, you two young devils. Come back, I want to speak to you."

"Do you run for it and I will stay," whispered Herbert.

In an instant the dog was before them, barring their way.

"No, we will both go. He will not hurt us if we obey him," said Marjorie, with a juster perception of chances and probabilities. "And the dog would not let me go," she added, as this well-named Demon crouched there, threatening and obstructive —the ultima ratio which we all must obey.

They turned back, hand in hand, and again faced the Hermit, who sat there in the sunlight, surrounded by the changing autumn trees as though he had been some frightful gnome of heroic stature — some mythical "charcoal burner" of German

fable, half-man, half-fiend, robber, murderer and sorcerer in one.

"Now that you have intruded on me, you must give an account of yourselves," began the Hermit, in the same violent and angry way in which he had spoken before. "Who are you? Why have you come to this old dog-hole of Lone Head? Who set you on the track of me? Here you, you girl, what is your name?"

"Marjorie Pentreath," said the young bride, proud of her new name.

The Hermit gave a perceptible start, and his eyes suddenly flamed with something that was as much emotion as anger.

"Who is he?" he asked after a pause, with a contemptuous jerk of his thumb towards Herbert.

"I am her husband," said Herbert.

"Silence, till you are spoken to!" roared the Hermit. "Let her speak, can't you? Here, you girl, come nearer to me; and you, sir, stand where you are. Don't be afraid," he added roughly, "the dog won't hurt you. Lie down, Demon! So, quiet, sir! Now, come," he said again to Marjorie. "Come nearer, and let me look at you."

Marjorie went forward till she came close to that grim interlocutor. As a sign of amity and confidence she held out her hand. The man was evidently a gentleman by origin, Robinson Crusoe-like as he was now by long neglect, and brutal as to manner and word. Still, there were the unmistakable signs in gesture and bearing for all his roughness; and when he spoke, his accent was that of an educated

man. Almost as if in spite of himself there was a certain faint aura of former gentlehood about him — almost as if he were doing violence to his truer self by his anger, his disregard, his very extravagance of surliness. A less wrathful expression came into his face as he rose from the tree-trunk, which served him for bench, to greet the pretty young creature standing there before him, like a nineteenth century wood-nymph in a picture hat and pale-blue gown.

"Who were you before you married?" he asked, more gently than he had yet spoken.

He took her ungloved, outstretched hand between both of his—his so rough and hardened, yet still so well-shaped, as would naturally belong to a man of good birth.

"Marjorie Hoyte," was her answer.

"Ah!" he said, drawing a deep breath. It was as if he had said, "I knew it."

"You have Cornish names," he then said, after a pause, in a still gentler voice.

"Yes, we are Cornish people," said Marjorie. "We both come from the same place —Summer Leas, near Penzance," she added, looking back to Herbert in the near distance —Rhaicos to her, the Hamadryad.

The hands of the strong, rude man trembled as they pressed hers with a friendly intention in their grasp.

"You were Marjorie Hoyte," he repeated softly; "and that whelp there is Herbert Pentreath."

His voice, his eyes, his whole bearing changed as he said this. His manifest interest in the girl did not extend to her husband.

"Yes," said Marjorie, startled in that he

knew her young lover's name, but with too keen a woman's flair to take up the point.

She instinctively felt that to let sleeping dogs lie was the only wise way of dealing with this formidable Hermit of Lone Head. What mystery soever there might be about this strange familiarity with her husband's Christian name—which she had not told—it was better not to notice it—though his scowl when he looked at her Rhaicos, and the accent which he threw into his voice when he spoke of him, made her tremble and shiver as though it had been the declaration of war and the presage of future sorrow. Yet what harm to Herbert could come from this remote and unknown man? To be sure, their runaway marriage had not improved his home prospects; but the eldest son of a family which for generations and generations

had been lords of the soil where they were born and bred—owners in times past of the very lives of the tillers of the ground and fishers in the deep, and now proprietors of all the rights that can accrue to stable wealth and solid power—that eldest son, even if he have made a premature marriage, has too firm a basis to fear the unformed dangers of a visionary possibility.

The Pentreaths had ever been a strong-willed, hard-handed race, with the inevitable black sheep mixed in among the whiter fleeces. There had been bold buccaneers in times past, and Captain Bobadils and soldiers of fortune—men who swore horribly in Flanders, and who fought for the side that paid best, irrespective of its merits—but the last who had suffered the penalty of his misdeeds had been Herbert's own uncle

Geoffrey, his father's elder brother—he who had murdered Matt Hoyte, Marjorie's father, for jealousy, they said. For had he not been engaged to pretty May Wrightson or ever he went to India? and did he not find on his return that she had jilted him and married Matt Hoyte on the sly as one might say, but as tight and fast as a church—on the sly or in the open as it might be?

And Geoffrey, being a wild sort of man, at once dour and passionate, revenged himself on his more fortunate rival by cutting short the thread which had crossed his own—shooting Matt on sight, and then drowning himself in Mount's Bay. His body had never been found, but his coat and hat and stick were all on the seashore, while his sinful, battered corse was tossed about by

the wild Atlantic waves—for, indeed, where else could it be?

This affair had created more than a sensation down at Summer Leas and the country round about, and the loudest and most forward to denounce it was Herbert's father, "old Herbert," as he was now generally called. He had no word too hard to fling at the peccant brother whose foul crime had sullied the family annals as they had never been sullied before. He had been active in helping on this marriage too, for he had had the younger brother's jealousy of his elder. As lads they had fought and struggled together; as men they had been rivals on more fields than one; and, truth to say, Herbert, who had remained in England reading for the Bar while Geoffrey had

gone with his regiment to India, was not sorry to play his brother this scurvy trick with respect to pretty May Wrightson, helping on the marriage which would be such a blow to the man he hated, and which would take all the sweetness out of his cup for ever. He had not foreseen the consequences. Had he done so, perhaps he would have hesitated; for murder has an ugly sound in a virtuous country place, and a murder and suicide combined do not tend to raise the repute of a county family. Still, there it was, and the deed once done cannot be recalled. The past is as true as the present, and its vices and virtues, its mistakes and its well-doing remain unaltered by time and untouched in their effects by repentance.

Herbert had effectually helped Matt

Hoyte to cross his brother's path, and that act could not be undone; and Geoffrey had revenged himself in grim fashion enough on the thief who had stolen his treasure. And that act, no more than the other could now be recalled—with all the consequences hanging like a ragged fringe thereto.

"Herbert Pentreath," repeated the Hermit in the same threatening voice, and with the same gloomy kind of hatred in his eyes. "The eldest son of the other Herbert?" he asked again.

"Yes," said Rhaicos, making a step forward.

"Back, sir!" shouted the Hermit. "A step nearer, and by the Lord I'll set the dog on you! A better beast than either you or your father, he shall tear the whelp's life out of you!"

"Who are you, to speak like this of my father?" said Herbert, his young man's pride of loyalty in arms and aflame.

"Who am I?" was the savage retort. "Like my dog, a better man than he. Oh, I know him!" he added bitterly. "No matter who I am, but I know Herbert Pentreath well enough; and I know of him that he is bad—bad from the crown of his head to the sole of his foot!"

This phrase he muttered to himself in a half-lost, half-furious way, his eyes fixed on vacancy, but blazing like balls of fire beneath his pent-house brows. Then he seemed to reconsider himself, and looked again at sweet Marjorie, whose hand was still in both of his, pressed as in a vice.

"For your sake," he said; "all for you, and for you only."

For her sake, what? Her young husband spared? This strange and unaccountable animosity, so far kept under that he would do the boy no harm—for her sake. Marjorie's heart beat with feverish anxiety, but she controlled all outward expression bravely, and with a little press on those hard, strong palms, she said gently, "We have intruded on you long enough now—we will go."

"Come again," said the Hermit. "Not you," he suddenly roared to Herbert, "but you, my bonny girl; do you come again and see me. Go now—but come again," he repeated.

With a sudden impulse, savage for all its friendliness, he drew the young wife close to his breast, and bent his shaggy head to kiss her on her forehead.

"May's daughter," he sighed to himself. "Mine that should have been!"

"Go!" he then thundered. "Go! and never let me see you again, or, God help me, I shall go mad!"

He flung himself into his wattled hut, dragging the dog with him, and groaning or rather howling like a wild beast in pain, while the young people ran swiftly through the narrow path by which they had come, and in due time found themselves on the outside of the wood safe from their perilous adventure.

Conjecture exhausted itself in vain. Who could he be? He was someone who knew their old home and their respective families, but who was he? Neither Herbert nor Marjorie remembered hearing of anyone answering to his description who had left

Summer Leas; but he must have been there at one time; and he must have been familiar with the place and people. It was a strange tangle and a terrifying mystery, but they could not get to the bottom of it; for they dared not write to their belongings—at least, not just yet. In time that too must come. Meanwhile they must lie low, as they had done since their marriage, and carry this mystery as quietly as they bore their own secret.

One day next week the strange, rough man, who was more like some gigantic gnome than a human being, came into the village, wandering round and about the houses, searching for the young people. The big dog, cat-footed, walked demurely at his heels. May's daughter, who should have been his, and that young cur, the

hated brother's son! How could he revenge himself anew? Wild thoughts of taking the girl, and carrying her off to some place unknown and undiscoverable, possessed him. He had caressed these thoughts for all these days and hours since he had seen those two before his hut. It would be the best return he could make. The young husband, his brother's son, should smart for the injury that had been done himself by the help and connivance of that brother. He would take her—and no one should ever find her again. And when he felt that he was going to die he would kill her, that she should not be left alone.

Suddenly, thinking all this, he met the two walking out as usual—for what English boy and girl do not walk when they

can? The Hermit had a sack of potatoes on his barrow as the ostensible reason why he had come into the "town."

"Oh! there you are!" he said gruffly. "Why don't you come for some more nuts?"

"We are afraid to intrude on you again," said Marjorie.

"You said we were not to go again," said Herbert.

"That's a lie!" thundered the Hermit. "I said you were not to come if you did not want to be torn limb from limb, but she—I want her. She is different."

"She is my wife, and where she goes I go," said Herbert, boldly.

The madman raised his hand.

"If I strike I kill," he said in his thundering voice.

"Nay, you don't harm him, if I have

a word to say," put in a man's rough voice, as Joe Stanley, the blacksmith, one of the biggest men of the place, the strongest and most resolute, came lounging by from the alehouse, on his way to the smithy.

One or two other men, attracted by the loud voices, joined in till they made a small crowd standing round the Hermit and his dog, now alert and threatening—that dog which they all regarded as in a certain sense the wild man's familiar—granting that he was man born of woman after their own pattern at all; which was doubtful.

Strong as he was, the Hermit saw that he was overmatched. For all the passionate power of madness to lend a still greater force to his own stalwart muscles—for all

the untamed brute's ferocity when set upon a victim—he was no match for those five brawny men who had gathered round. But defeat was worse than madness to him, and in a struggle at least he would pay off some part of the debt accruing. With an oath he turned against the blacksmith, but before the two men closed, Marjorie stepped between them, her sweet face raised to the dark and lowering countenance of the Hermit, and her hands laid softly on his arms.

"For my sake," she said. "Do not strike, for my sake."

The fire died out of those burning eyes. The pallor of mortal hate and rage gave place to a flush that was at the least human. The murderer's paroxysm passed, and like some legendary knight possessed

by a demon, now exorcised by an angel, the human heart of the poor, half-crazed recluse broke through the crust of his insane desire, and taking Marjorie's hands in his he said, in a softer voice than the world hereabouts had ever heard from him, "My bonny bird! — for thee aught thou wilt! Sweet May—oh, my darling!—for thee my life itself, if that would please thee!"

Then with an unearthly cry he turned and fled from the hamlet like one pursued. And, strong in thew and muscle as they were, overmatching the poor madman by five to one, the men breathed more freely when he and that fearsome brute were gone.

Perhaps it was instinct—perhaps it was curiosity. Motives are often interwoven too closely to be easily classified, and our

reason does not give us that fairy wand which helped the poor prosecuted princess in her task of disentanglement. Hence, whether it was interest or curiosity which led her thoughts, Marjorie did not care to determine, but sure it was she thought of this terrifying man, who yet had been so gentle with her, till the desire to see him became overpowering, and she braved her young husband's first outburst of displeasure by saying that she would try and find his hut to see how he was getting on.

"It is inhuman to leave him like that," she said, the tears starting to her pretty blue eyes. "He will not hurt us, and he cannot be left, perhaps to die, in that wretched hut alone."

"It is absurd — Quixotic — unfeminine," said Herbert.

"Unfeminine to visit the sick and sad?" said Marjorie, a little hotly.

"A man you know nothing about except that he lives like a beast, and is undoubtedly a madman!" flashed out Herbert, with still more heat.

"He has always been gentle and amenable with me," said Marjorie.

"And a brute to me," said Herbert.

"Let me go alone then," was her next move; but this her husband checkmated on the instant, giving way finally, as he was sure to do, by a sullen acquiescence in her desire—wrong and foolish as it was, and —"very well, if she made such a point of it she should go; they would both go and see him, and the consequences, whatever they might be"—said with the air of approaching martyrdom—"would be on her head."

Accordingly, one brisk bright autumn day they went back to the enchanted wood, in the apparently hopeless attempt to find the hut which no one who sought could ever find. And while they were beating from path to path Demon suddenly crashed through the branches, fangs uncovered, and the hair like bristles over his lank body, prepared to do battle for the sanctity of his master's retreat. When he saw who it was, his whole countenance changed; and coming up to Marjorie he licked her hand as if in welcome. Then he trotted before her, loftily ignoring Herbert, looking back to see that she was following, and behaving like a dog-angel rather than the Demon he was. He led them straight to the hut which his master had made his ark of safety, and which was now his bed of

death. For the poor Hermit was dying. With all his sins on his head—that murder which had made Marjorie fatherless and her mother a widow—that hatred for his brother which had turned his blood to poison and then maddened his brain—there he lay at the entrance to that Great Beyond where that which awaiteth man, no man knoweth.

Stooping her fair head, sweet Marjorie entered the hut, always preceded and, as it were, led by the dog. Herbert followed as an act of devotion and loyalty, but also as one of martyrdom. On their entrance the dying man opened his eyes, and seeing Marjorie, held out his wasted arms.

"My May! My love!" he said in a feeble voice. "Once more my own!"

"But who are you!" cried Marjorie,

startled beyond herself — beyond reticence.

"I? Who am I?" he returned, still more feebly. "Why do you ask? Who should I be but Geoffrey Pentreath, your affianced husband come back to claim you for his own?"

When the story was told to Herbert's father on the reconciliation with the two runaways, which, of course, had to come like other things, the mystery was made clear. The young people had never heard any particulars about the uncle of the one or the murdered father of the other. We do not tell children these family tragedies, and the dying man's last words were riddles to them they could not solve. "Old Herbert" explained the whole matter to his son, not sparing the brother whose

painful life of expiation, if it could be called by that name, and whose tragic death in his lonely sorrow and despair, could not sweeten the bitter feeling which had always existed in the more "respectable" man's heart.

"He cheated justice all his life," said Herbert's father, with a cruel backward look to the time when Geoffrey had stood between him and the sun. "He cheated justice, but the devil has got his own now! All the same, my boy, we must keep this thing dark, for, were it known that your uncle, the elder brother, had been alive all these years, we should be ruined, as none of our acts would be legal. Mystery or murder—illegality or crime—has a curse fallen on the House of Pentreath?"

A CONTEST OF WITS

He liked her—immensely; and he believed that she liked him. She made as though she did, and young men in love are credulous as to signs of response from the undeclared beloved. In this especial case Hugh Maxwell was disturbed as well as credulous; for the return of love, even of love undeclared on both sides alike, carries with it a certain obligation which an honourable man feels bound to fulfil. And it would be such a wretchedly bad marriage for him to make. The heir to the estate; one of the great Maxwell family, and as proud of his blood as if he had descended from kings or demi-gods; the idol

of his mother, herself of as good lineage as his father; young, handsome, well-conditioned all through—and she, this pretty Rosa Watson, nothing but the daughter of a lodging-house keeper! Of course it would be a bad marriage for him to make; and though, for himself, he was man enough to defy the world and hold it all well lost for love, yet when he thought of his mother and sisters, his father and his younger brothers, who now looked up to him as to their best example, his heart failed him. Hence, naturally enough, his credulity as to those signs of response was fringed with dismay here, with rapture there, as family pride or personal love predominated.

As for Rosa herself she seemed to be just one of those unreflecting maiden-dreamers

who drift on to the rocks of a hopeless passion in pure unconsciousness as to their whereabouts. She might return Hugh Maxwell's love, but an' she did surely return it without self-knowledge and with as little calculation. What she felt she showed with the *naïveté* of a child—the frankness born of absolute innocence. When he came home sooner than was expected, her fair face broke into smiles as eloquent as the golden sunrise of a June morning. When he was later than was expected, she either pouted like a displeased child or shed silly little tears of glad relief. If he brought her a flower, she kissed it before wearing—when he gave her a brooch, she was another Gretchen in the innocent rejoicing of her girlish vanity. She attended to his personal comforts—

was solicitous as to the dainty arrangements of his table and his room. She arranged his flowers with natural artistry, and tied the ribbons of his art-muslin draperies with natural grace. She herself mended his linen, which she then showed him with childlike pride! and he knew neither the loss of a button nor the disgrace of a rent. Not even at High Craig, with its slightly barbaric profusion of service, and under the luxurious maintenance of his mother, was he so thoroughly well cared for as in these lodgings in King Street, where Rosa Watson was his waiting-maid, and her mother was his cook and housekeeper.

And then, how pretty she was! and, for one of her class—no! for one of any class—how refined and well-educated! Of

middle height, slenderly framed, and as fair as a flower, she realised the poetic ideal of an English girl in both form and colouring. In manner she was frank and artless; in gesture rhythmic, graceful, suggestive. She had an undulating kind of gliding movement when she walked which was the very perfection of the poetry of motion; and she had several pretty little tricks, such as crumpling up her forehead when perplexed or surprised—throwing out her hands, palm uppermost, when pleased —ruffling her golden curly hair when startled—that made her simply adorable to all men, and that filled Hugh Maxwell's soul with a very passion of admiration, such as entranced him and exalted her. As for her education—to Hugh's mind what girl knew more than she, knew too

much—and she who knew less knew too little. Himself more of an athlete than a student, he wanted no more intellectual companion than this pretty Rosa, with her fervent love of music—she played with notable brilliancy, and her voice was sweet and just—were not these the poles round which twined as vines her mother's special hopes?—those vines which were to bear fruit in the coming by-and-by?—her naïve criticisms on this play, that actor—her appreciation of the minor novels and some of the minor poets—her enthusiasm for pictures and her shrewd common sense in matters of daily life and conduct. No! decidedly she was all that a girl should be; and the sole kink in the silken cord was her social status. Personally she was perfect. Did the rest much signify?

Hugh Maxwell rented the drawing-room floor of that house in King Street, where Mrs Watson let lodgings and lived on the proceeds. The dining-room was occupied by Joseph Darley, a rising young barrister of boundless ambition and illimitable prospects. The two men were as different, one from the other, as day and night. Hugh Maxwell was dark-haired and dark-eyed, reserved, shy, proud; never quite at ease with women; in manner cold; in nature so much concentrated fire. Joseph Darley was gay, genial, loquacious, with a frank bearing and glib speech. Underneath these appearances Hugh was credulous and substantially "green," too sincere in his own person to be suspicious of others; while Joseph was astute, watchful, as cunning as a fox, as suspicious as a detective, and with

a faculty for getting to the back of things worthy of a son of Ithuriel himself.

And both men were in love with Rosa, each in his own way; and Rosa, in her own way, made each believe that she loved him.

It was a perilous game to play, but all great enterprises are perilous, and diamonds are not picked up like pebbles by the wayside. The one grand ambition of the girl's life, for which she had been educated and for which she was striving, was to marry a gentleman. Not unreasonably, she thought two distinct strings that would not get entangled better than one. Then, if Hugh's snapped, Joseph's might hold out, and send her silver shaft into the gold of her desire. Maxwell or Darley—it was a matter of indifference to her which name she bore, so

long as she might bear one. The Scotch laird's, or the Devonshire squire's—what cared she into which of those two reluctant families she might be thrust as the eldest son's undesirable wife, so long as she was safely planted in one? Hence she deftly twisted her twy-fold cord, and played her double game with the consummate skill of her kind, and was expectant and elate—wary yet adventurous.

It was a gala night. The illuminations would be magnificent and the crowd appalling. No sane woman would venture out alone, and all women of ordinary physical ability would wish to go. In the dark, and lost in the throng, the proud blood of the Maxwells was safe from untoward observation—the caution necessary for a rising barrister with his eyes on the woolsack need

fear no damaging betrayal. Rosa was a young woman, and a pretty one; and it would be a shame were she not to enjoy the night's diversion.

"Who will take you, Rosa?" said Mrs Watson, anxiously.

"The first who asks me," answers Rosa, carelessly.

"It ought to come to a head with one or the other. Things have trailed long enough," said the mother.

"Well! I can't force it!" said Rosa, snappishly. She felt it hard to be rebuked, though never so lightly, when really she was like some æsthetic octopus doing its best to entangle its firmly-anchored prey. "I wish as much as you, mother, that one or other of them would know his own mind, and put an end to

it one way or another. They send me half dotty between them."

"Don't be vulgar, Rosa," said Mrs Watson, severely.

She was a genteel woman in her own person, and repudiated slang as became the widow of an artist, who, though unsuccessful and ill-instructed, was always of the same profession as Sir Frederic and Sir John. Besides this, she had had a dear papa who used to keep his silver toast-rack and teapot at his banker's; where they were still when the china racks got broken or the Rockingham lost its spout, and she had not had time to renew them.

Rosa checked the pert reply that rose to her lips. She was like the actor who blacked himself all over when he played

Othello. Her *rôle* to these two gentlemen was one of unvarying sweetness — to Joseph Darley coloured with archness, to Hugh Maxwell with simplicity—and it was better business to carry on the same game downstairs with her mother than to let herself go here, to be taken back there.

"Slang is so catching!" she said amiably.

But Mrs Watson was one of those women who trample on the prostrate and humiliate the humble. Instead of taking her daughter's concession with sugar she dosed it with pepper, saying tartly,—

"Then you have no business to catch it up after all the pains I have taken to make a lady of you, and give you a good education, and make you fit to take any position you like. Spoiling yourself with slang, indeed! I wonder what next!"

"Will you come out with me, and see the illuminations, Rosy?" asked Joseph Darley, as she took in his dinner, which the maid-of-all-work carried from the kitchen to the door.

His dinner-hour was half-past seven; Hugh Maxwell's was eight.

"Oh, that would be jolly!" cried Rosa, who with the barrister affected a certain delicate and ethereal suggestion of the music-hall divinity — a certain free-going "disinvortura" proper to the girl with no nonsense about her; but who yet was substantially good and had not gone over the borders by a hair's-breadth.

"Well, will you be ready at ten?"

"Sharp," said Rosa.

"And after we have seen the best of the show I will take you to St

James's, and we'll have supper," said Joseph.

"And champagne?" added Rosa, her bright blue eyes dancing.

"And champagne," answered the barrister, laughing.

Rosa's frank love of good cheer—when with him—always amused him and received from him a ready response. He was the sort of man who liked to see pretty girls eat with appetite and drink with enjoyment.

"That will be prime!" said Rosa, as she busied herself about the table, and took care of the dining-room lodger's comforts.

"Suppose that chap upstairs asked you, what then?" said Joseph, his keen eyes twinkling.

"Mr Maxwell? No fear!" was the disdainful little answer. "He's not the sort."

"No?"

"No, never!"

"Never been out with him?" asked the barrister, scraping the bone of his bird.

"Well, I do remember once he took mother and me to a twopenny-halfpenny kind of a peepshow," answered Rosa, with fine disdain. "He is far too high and mighty for my taste. I like them franker and freer."

"Like me. Hey, Rosa?"

"Yes, like you," said Rosa, laying her hand familiarly on the young man's shoulder. "You're a good sort, Mr Darley."

"And Mr Maxwell is not?" said the prospective Lord Chancellor, quickly.

The girl shrugged her shoulders.

"Good for his kind, I daresay," she said. "But his kind isn't mine."

Then the young man flung himself back in his chair and laughed. Rosa laughed too, thinking it was her own smartness that amused him.

The dining-room dinner was cleared away and Joseph had settled to his cigar and the last new novel when Hugh Maxwell came in. Mrs Watson was far too good a manager, and understood her own interests too well, not to be an admirable cook. She gave her gentlemen dinners of such quality as to make them indifferent to their club *chef;* whereby she had the benefit accruing from their remains, and Rosa the advantage of their company. It was an arrangement that suited everyone

all round, and the piper got paid in good coin from each.

"I have been thinking, Rosa," said Hugh, as the pretty girl flitted about him, as graceful as a nymph, as useful as a good fairy; "would you like to see the illuminations to-night?"

He looked at her shyly as he spoke, then turned away his eyes as if he was uncertain how she would take his offer.

There was nothing very compromising in it taken by itself. It was his own heart, his own consciousness that gave it force and meaning.

"Oh, indeed I would!" cried Rosa, her face breaking out into those simple, sweet and infantile smiles which made Hugh Maxwell's heart throb with the profane desire to take her in his arms and kiss her.

"Well, get ready by about ten, can you? We will go and see the principal shops, and I will take you into the park, where we shall get a good view of the fireworks."

No offer of supper and champagne from him! A decorous walk through the streets and a respectable "pitch" in the park was all that Hugh Maxwell, the shy athlete, dared to offer the girl he loved.

"Oh, that will be lovely!" said Rosa, clasping her white hands together—those white soft hands with the taper fingers and slightly incurved tips which she took especial pains to keep in aristocratic order. "I will tell mother when I go downstairs. I hope she will let me go," she added, with sudden gravity, her eyes drooping as if with this as sudden fear.

"I should think she would. I do not see why she should not," said Hugh, just a trifle stiffly.

The pride of the Maxwells revolted at the idea of a woman like Mrs Watson objecting to his taking her daughter under his protection to see the street illuminations, or anything else.

"Ah, but you see dear mother is so very careful of me," said Rosa, gently. "She has always brought me up to be so particular. But I will ask her. Perhaps she will not mind, as it's you, Mr Maxwell." Here she raised her candid eyes full into Hugh's face. "She has so much respect for you—indeed, we all have! So perhaps she will not mind. But I'll ask her, and then I'll tell you."

Rosa was a little longer than usual

before she brought up the apricot tart which rounded off the dinner; and Hugh's heart sank low in consequence. When she came back her eyes were red and tears stood in them. The mustard she had sniffed was freshly made and pungent. Besides, she was really annoyed, for though she liked Joseph Darley best for himself, both she and her mother thought Hugh Maxwell the easier fish to catch, and to-night was a good opportunity. But she dared not break her engagement with the barrister. She was a little too much in his power to offend.

"Mother sends you her best thanks," she said in a voice that just a little faltered. It seemed as if she made brave efforts to keep it steady, and could

not. "But she says she would rather I did not go out to-night. Many, many thanks. It was so good of you to ask me. I shall never forget it—never!"

Her evident disappointment, her sweetness and simplicity, her obedience to her mother, her childish chagrin, all touched Hugh's heart with a deeper feeling than ordinary, deep as that ordinary feeling was.

"Don't cry, Rosa," he said with dangerous tenderness, and somewhat off his guard. "Tell your mother from me to reconsider her determination, to think that—"

He stopped himself in time. Was he really quite prepared to utter the decisive words, and send a message to his landlady, binding himself to Rosa? To-

morrow, perhaps, or the day after; but not yet—not quite yet, to-night.

With an effort, but still effectually, he strangled those imprudent words before they leapt to life on his lips; and Rosa felt and knew all that she had lost, and how the psychological moment had passed by.

There was, then, nothing for it but to keep her appointment with Joseph Darley; when perhaps the excitement and closer contact in the crowd, with the supper and champagne to follow, would set permanent fire to this tantalising love which had the habit of blazing up to a certain height and then dying down into nothing but smoke and ashes. If so, she would then have secured the grand prize for which she was

striving with so much cleverness and self-mastery.

When ten o'clock came, looking saucy and bewitching in her wickedest hat, she slipped like a mouse into Mr Joseph Darley's room. After some little half-romping preliminaries, wherein kisses were snatched and taps less corrective than caressing were given, they prepared to go out, and the fun of the fair was at hand. Joseph opened the dining-room door, and looked out to make sure, for Rosa's sake, that the coast was clear, and that no prying eyes were about. The gas was lowered, but the fire burnt brightly in the grate, and everything was reflected in the "large and limpid mirror behind" as clearly as if that reflection had been the thing itself. Rosa, in her audacious hat and becoming cape, stood behind the door, well

shielded from the eyes of a passer-by—well shielded from the eyes of Mr Hugh Maxwell, who, just then, as ill-luck would have it, came down the stairs.

The two young men were on speaking terms together, though not on visiting; and Joseph at least knew something of the underneath of his cards.

"Going to see the illuminations?" asked Hugh, stopping opposite the open door of the dining-room, where Joseph stood in his hat and coat.

"Yes; and you?" was the rejoinder.

"Yes; shall we go together?" said Hugh.

It was so unlike him to make such a proposition. It was as if he had been impelled by the Tempter.

"Thanks, but I have a companion. You

know the old saying about three and two," laughed Joseph.

Always impelled by that unseen Tempter, Hugh, the least curious and most delicate of men, looked full into Joseph's room. Standing against the door, crouched in the angle, but clearly shown by the mirror, was pretty Rosa Watson in her walking costume —her business here, and the barrister's companionship, confessed.

"Oh, all right," said Hugh, with a curiously hoarse and discordant laugh. "Good-night, and good luck. To-night the fireworks, to-morrow the charred sticks."

"What the deuce did he mean?" thought Joseph, as Maxwell went out, slamming the street door behind him with unwonted violence.

He turned to speak to Rosa, and then saw what Hugh had seen.

"By Jove!" he laughed.

"Did he see me?" asked Rosa, in an agony.

"How could he?" said Joseph. "Were you not behind the door? Besides, if he did, what does it matter? You are nothing to him, are you?"

"No," said Rosa, vehemently. "But all the same I should not like him to have seen me."

"Oh, bother; what does he care?" laughed Joseph, who saw and understood her whole situation. "Come along. Hey for the sights and the champagne, and a fig for who sees and who doesn't."

. . . . . .

Mrs Watson's drawing-room floor was to be let. There had been no explanation and no scene; but Rosa knew as well as if she had been told, why, the next morning Hugh

Maxwell gave notice, packed, paid and left, all within the space of two hours. She did not understand how it had been found out, but found out her escapade with Joseph Darley certainly had been. And she had lost the chance—not a bad one—of being the Scottish laird's wife in consequence.

But how could she make Mr Joseph Darley pay? To put the burden on his shoulders would be to stultify her past self and lose all potential profits. She had said so often that the chappie in the drawing-room was a duffer, and no more to her than a dancing dog—how could she confess now that she had lied, and by her lying had lost a lover who might have landed her where she wished to be? It was a cleft stick, and the pretty *intriguante* was caught therein.

All of which Mr Joseph Darley understood and cruelly enjoyed. It was an unequal contest, and at times he felt ashamed of himself for this duel of wits between his trained intellect and the mere native artfulness of an untutored girl. He was so far the superior! It was like a contest between a greyhound and a toy terrier—a hawk and a humming bird. She had no chance against him. It was a one-sided game, and cruel at that.

The drawing-room floor did not long remain empty. Young Lord Clasper, the Earl of Norman's eldest son, took the rooms, and was soon as much at home as Hugh Maxwell had been. He was of quite a different type from both Hugh and Joseph Darley. Without ambition, without family pride or self-respect, his ideal

of life was coarse amusement, and his ideal of womanhood, a music-hall favourite, able to kick off a man's hat with her foot, and unburdened by shyness, reserve or modesty. Ill at ease with women of his own class, he was only his natural self when with girls of a low type both in social standing and moral character. As to the last, indeed, he did not believe that girls of a low social standing had any at all. Probably those with whom he mainly consorted had not.

When he took Mrs Watson's drawing-rooms, and was waited on by Rosa, he made sure he had fallen on his feet in the matter of flirtatious pastime. He did not understand how a pretty young girl, waiting on her mother's gentlemen, could keep herself select if they chose the other

thing. But Rosa had not been for the last two years an astute and careful schemer for an aristocratic and wealthy marriage, to be caught out by the boorish freedom of even an earl's son; and Lord Clasper had soon to learn the exact distance at which she intended he should stand. Whether he liked it or not, he was forced to obey the rules of conduct laid down by her for his wholesome restraint and her own self-preservation; and the prudent rigidity of this lodging-house keeper's pretty daughter was one of the most extraordinary experiences which the young lord had as yet had.

Was it possible? The curly golden head debated the question long and anxiously. Others had—why not she? They were not prettier than she — nor cleverer

—perhaps not so clever — but they had landed themselves on the peeress's benches in the House of Lords — they had made good their claim to that exclusive pew in the Royal Chapel. And if they, why not she? But there was a difference. These had been famous in their own world and had had a "name" which carried far in the estimation of their adorers. Divinities on the stage, they were the Desirable off it; gaining in admiration in proportion to what they lost in esteem. But that admiration made them peeresses; and esteem would have left them merely ballet girls or minor actresses. Suppose she were to go that same way? She was deft and clever, and her beauty would stand her in good stead. Suppose she made a hit on the

boards? Everything does not depend on patient learning and toilsome apprenticeship. Success has been won at a bound, and will be again. And if by others, why not her?

Lord Clasper, with his talk of music halls and theatres, his familiarity with managers and *coryphées* seemed almost like an indication, pointing out the way she should go. It would be a kind of crass ingratitude and flying in the face of Direction if she failed to take advantage of the means brought so opportunely to her hand; more especially when he so often said to her quite seriously, "I wonder you have never thought of the stage, Miss Watson. With your face and figure you have a fortune there, and I would almost guarantee your success. Why not

chuck up this lodging-house business and try the boards?"

"Perhaps I should not succeed," said Rosa, for the pleasure of hearing herself contradicted.

"Not succeed? I'd bet my bottom dollar on your success," said Lord Clasper. "No fear! You'd take the cake and no mistake, else I'd eat my boots."

Rosa threw up her hands, palms outermost.

"If I could! If only I could!" she cried. "It has been the dream of my life! If only I could realise it,"

"Nothing more easy," said the young man, encouragingly. "I'll just speak to Fred about you, and I'm sure he'll give you an engagement. At first, don't you know, it may be only as a super, to stand

among a crowd, and get accustomed to the tread of the stage and the look of the house. But we all have to walk before we can fly, and the stage is like everything else."

"If you really think I should succeed, Lord Clasper," said Rosa, her pretty face full of the sweetest look of beseeching diffidence—the tender little faint heart needing encouragement.

"Sure as fate," said Lord Clasper.

"Then I'll speak to mother," said Rosa, and she said it with the look and accent of one consulting the gods.

It was part of her play to pretend that mother guided her life and ruled her actions. This is part of the play of all self-willed girls who desire power and shirk responsibility.

"And if your mother knows the ropes she will say 'Yes,' like a shot," said Lord Clasper.

Instead of her mother, Rosa consulted Mr Joseph Darley. He listened to all she had to say, then laughed in his cynically good-natured way.

"Why not?" he said. "You'd make a capital actress, Rosa. Faith! you'll not need much teaching!"

"Think not? That's encouraging!" said Rosa, with her innocent air. "I know I can learn poetry by heart as quick as most girls. I always took the prize at school."

"A good beginning," said Mr Darley.

"And I hope won't make a bad ending," returned Rosa, demurely.

"That depends on yourself, and how much ballast you have," was the reply.

"I don't think I want for that," she said. "It isn't many people could take me off my feet, I assure you."

"I believe you there," said Mr Darley, with a certain look of admiration. "You are as cute a little cuss as I know anywhere, Miss Rosy; and yet," he added, with a sudden reminiscence, and that laugh which Rosa hated as much as she feared, "even you can wobble when it suits you. But wobbling don't always pay, does it, Rosy?"

"I'm sure I don't know what you mean, and you are very disagreeable," said Rosa, tartly, as she took away the barrister's plate, and in spite of all the grace of her outward movement, in spirit and intention flounced out of the room.

If only she could be revenged on Mr Joseph Darley! This thought was as the

Aaron's rod that swallowed all the others. If only she could be revenged on him, and make him "sing as small" as he had hitherto made her!

"You know, Rosa, I care only for your good," said the mother when, the dinners of their gentlemen ended, the two sat in conclave together in the housekeeper's room, which they had made their private parlour. "If you think you will succeed, and you see your way clearly, I have no objection. A girl can keep herself respectable on the stage as well as off it, and you have too much good sense, besides too much at stake, to go wrong."

"Oh, I shall keep straight enough, mother, never fear!" said Rosa, with a certain defiant little toss of her head that was exasperating but reassuring too.

"It will tell against your chances if you don't," said Mrs Watson. "You've got to marry a gentleman, Rosa. It's what you've been brought up to, and what you are bound to do, and you've got to keep this always in mind."

"So I do," said Rosa, speaking with a certain acerbity which betrayed the depth of her disappointment, so far as things had yet gone.

"And don't speak like that to me," retorted the mother, who never lost an opportunity of snubbing the daughter she made pretence to rule, and who ruled her instead.

It all came about as was hoped and planned. Through Lord Clasper's introduction the lodging-house keeper's pretty daughter was taken on at one of the minor

theatres, at first as a mere supernumerary to stand about the stage, when a crowd of pretty creatures were wanted for living furniture, and not as active agents in the piece. Then she went into training as a chorus singer, and so, by degrees, which in her case were not slow, worked her way into small parts, where she had a few lines to herself, or a few snatches of song, unencumbered by a more impressive chorus. Her tact, her natural cleverness, her pretty face, her charming manners, won her a certain victory, and her good-natured flattery of her companions, coupled with her absolute discretion concerning their lovers, completed her conquest, both over the disabilities necessarily belonging to the lateness of her training, and the jealousy natural to a pushing, striving company of

pretty girls, each wanting to be first.

For the authorities who could make or mar her, she knew, no one better, how to mingle provocation and futilities of hope that kept her admirers always on the alert, and never soured them into enmity. She was like some bewitching Will-o'-the-wisp whom men were bound to follow, ever hoping to come up to her, and never succeeding — a fairy, beckoning, laughing, dancing before them, and evasive to the end.

Her theatrical career naturally put an end to her attendance on her mother's gentlemen, but she saw a good deal of both the young lord and the barrister, and was ever dignified and prudent to the one—arch, tender and amusing to the other.

Making her way on the boards as she was, and becoming a kind of public favourite in her own restricted and not supremely elevated sphere, she never suffered herself to be "airified," as she called it, to Joseph Darley; but was always the Rosa whom he had known for two years now, and had treated with a familiarity which yet had never gone beyond the bounds of essential propriety.

And this—as it seemed to him—unaffected constancy of attitude did just a little touch the sceptical heart of the barrister, and make him more than once doubt his accuracy of judgment. Was she, after all, more sincere and less double than he had always thought her? Was she a good girl at bottom? and had he misjudged her?

He would not have doubted himself and

his previsions had he been able to read into the girl's heart; where always lay, like a little snake, the desire to be even with Mr Joseph Darley, whose mind she knew better than he knew hers. Consciously or unconsciously he had spoilt her best chance, and she "owed him one" for that. And forbye this, she knew that she had not taken him in in the earlier days. She was not quite so sure now. His manner was somewhat different from what it had been, and his cynicism was not so apparent. If, after all, she could circumvent him? It would be a triumph for which she would willingly give up her stage-life.

Taken at its best that stage-life was not the kind of thing she liked, or that for which she had been designed by nature or education. And her marriage with a gentleman

seemed almost less likely to the actress than to the waitress. Love, admiration, flattery, presents—anything you like but marriage. And it was this marriage which alone she desired.

The troupe of which Rosa Watson formed part went touring into the provinces. It was a pleasant change for all, and the pretty girl enjoyed it perhaps more than any. Greedy of new emotions and of fresh experiences as she was, this break in the order of her days pleased her, and she was proportionately bright and charming.

It seemed to her as if something more than ordinary were about to happen to her —as if some golden cloud floating about her were about to consolidate itself and descend in solid value into her lap. Yet, what was it to be? She had given up all

hope of Lord Clasper, whom once she thought she might effectually have made her own. He would have flirted with her to any extent, but he would not marry her. If he married at all it would be that impudent little Kitty Clover, who had entangled herself about those coarse fibres which made up his heart, and who fooled him to the top of her bent. This did not prevent his flirting with other girls—Rosa or another; but he would not marry.

When Rosa understood this she drew back and comported herself with even yet more discretion; so much so that she might have been the *rosière* of a virtuous French village without the chance of a bouquet of scarlet flowers sent to her bridal as a sign—perhaps a betrayal. And always there was Mr Joseph Darley, whom

she secretly considered responsible for her failure with Hugh Maxwell, and as secretly determined should pay for the same.

Their tour led the troupe to Scotland, where they had a grand success—where Rosa by her beauty was the cynosure, and where her unstained character stood her in good stead. She had somehow contrived to make her impeccable virtue publicly known, and she gained in consequence all round. It was quite exhilarating to the defenders of the stage and the believers in human nature to hear all the handsome things which were said about this pretty young actress; and even the fastest girls in the troupe wished the like could be said of them. And yet even those fastest girls did not malign her, for she never played off the cold disdainful airs of the

virtuous when dealing with them, but made as though she knew nothing, saw nothing, suspected nothing.

In the midst of all this pleasant excitement who should turn up but Mr Joseph Darley, also touring in Scotland, and not ashamed to continue his London acquaintance with Rosa, for all that here she was an actress and there she was his landlady's daughter! And when he came to see her, Rosa's fair face flushed, her eyes took the inward kind of light of one who meditates, and the golden cloud above her head seemed to draw somewhat closer and take a more tangible and understandable form.

After a short and joyous conversation, said the pretty young actress, "Come and have supper with me after the theatre. Do you remember that supper after the

illuminations?" she added, with a laugh that tried to be more natural than it was. "You gave that supper to me when I was a nobody; now I will return it to you."

"What a little brick you are!" said Mr Darley, admiringly.

He liked the frank way in which she alluded to her undistinguished past. There was no nonsense about her in good faith. She was always the same bright, bonny little girl with that delicate suggestion of the music-hall divinity submerged now in the same dignified gaiety of the successful actress.

"Then you'll come?" said Rosa.

"With pleasure," he returned.

And, the compact made, the talk wandered off on to other topics, and then the rising barrister took his leave and Rosa Watson sat down—and thought.

After she had thought for some time, and had made out her course, she sent a note to Lord Clasper, asking him to come over at once and see her. Greatly wondering, he came lumbering along, not knowing what on earth the business could be which made the young actress send for him. When she had enlightened him he slapped his knees and laughed till the tears came. It was the funniest joke he had ever heard, and he promised to play his part on the lines laid down. He and Kitty Clover would be there, and the supper should "go" and be a success. It should give Rosa all she wanted, and she would have reached the goal of her desire. Ah, it was a prime joke—rare fun—and Rosa was indeed a brick.

Then he left, as Joseph Darley before

him; but before he left the hotel he was closeted for a good ten minutes with the manager, who promised to do his part too on the lines laid down by my lord. It was a nice little plot, well conceived, and if carried out as conceived it would be grandly successful. All depended, however, on the carrying out and the point to which the barrister could be brought.

Never was such a gay and brilliant supper. It began with the perfection of gaiety, but as time went on it grew loud and noisy. Surely the wine was extra strong, for Mr Darley, who was a distinctly abstemious man, suffered from the small amount he took—suffered in the way of incipient intoxication—intoxication just to the point of recklessness and muddle-headedness. He was no longer the clear-

witted, calm-judging barrister, but a wild and noisy, reckless and inconsequent reveller, and he and Lord Clasper together, made a tumult that would have damaged the character of any hotel in Great Britain. It was too much for the respectable manager of the "Cock-a-leekie," who after a little came in with his wife and half-a-dozen waiters behind him to remonstrate strongly, to his remonstrance adding the threat, which he could so easily fulfil, of turning the whole riotous crew into the street.

"Then," said Rosa, rising in indignation; "how dare you speak to me or my husband in this manner?"

"Your husband!" ejaculated the manager.

"Say you are. Say she is your wife, man, to save her character. It will be her ruin else," whispered Lord Clasper to Joseph.

"Yes, how dare you speak to my wife like this?" said Joseph, a little thickly.

"Then she is your wife, sir?" said the manager.

"Yes," said Joseph.

"And he is your husband, madam?"

"Yes," said Rosa.

"In which case I apologise, and I am sorry I disturbed you," returned the manager, and he and all his following left the room.

Then Rosa laughed, and Lord Clasper filled his glass to the brim.

"Health to the bride and bridegroom, Mr and Mrs Darley!" he said. "As good a marriage as by a bench of Bishops!"

The phrase sobered the man whom the pretty actress had tricked. They were in Scotland, where a declaration before witnesses is as good as the marriage ceremony

by a clergyman or the bonds forged by the registrar:—and this was just the point which Rosa had made and he had forgotten. Whatever might be their life in the future, she was his wife now, and in the contest of wits between them it was not she who had scored the failure. The butterfly had defied the wheel, and the humming bird had circumvented the hawk; and a London lodging-house keeper's clever little daughter had tricked and got the better of one of the astutest men at the Bar—a born detective and own brother to Ithuriel, who had his eyes on the woolsack and cradled his Hope in a peerage.

WHO WAS IT?

It was a pity that the sisters did not agree better together, and that, left orphans as they were, they should not have clung to each other with more fidelity and affection. For if they did not love each other, who would? And if they were not loyal to their kinship, who could be trusted for friendliness? The very guardians, who were of no kith, were more affectionate to their wards than were these to each other; and Jasper, the son, was much more like a brother to Blanche than Blanche was like a sister to Rosalie.

Yet, indeed, it was by no fault of Rosalie's that her only sister was the least

of a friend and the most of a foe of all in her little world—the least of a friend and the most of a foe of all save Nurse Wynter. And *she* had never a good word for Rosalie nor a hard one for Blanche. Not that she had any personal grudge against the elder girl. It was really the excess of her love for Blanche that made her so unjust to Blanche's sister — only jealousy for her darling's happiness, and fear of a possible rival in those large dark eyes, that soft caressing manner, that sweet and plastic temper, which made her wish to destroy the status and the chance of the newcomer.

For the last three years — ever since Rosalie was eighteen — the two girls had been separated. Rosalie had been abroad with a certain Mrs Laver, and Blanche had

been at school near London, spending her holidays at her guardians'—always under the especial care of Nurse Wynter, who was like her second mother. But when Rosalie came of age she was forced to return to England to settle certain matters of inheritance; and then the sisters, who had been longing to meet, and had written weekly budgets of love to each other for the last three years, were brought together; and before the month was out the pretty little idyl of sisterly affection had passed into airy nothingness, and a very ugly and discordant epos had taken its place instead.

Blanche, from loving and longing to be with Rosalie—from the childlike invocatiou of her sister's name as her defender against unrighteous judgment whenever she was in

trouble with the authorities, rebuked for a fault or denied a request—turned suddenly round into dislike and suspicion; and before Rosalie had fully realised the change, the whole circle knew of this strange animosity, and that the sisters, who had been such friends on paper, were now nothing less than enemies through contact.

It was hard work for the guardians, Mr and Mrs Tilton, to keep even-handed justice between the girls. It was only natural that pretty Blanche should be the nearer to them of the two. She was more their own than Rosalie; and they thought they understood her better. Rosalie had been so long away, that they felt her as a kind of stranger to them—someone with a well-known name and familiar address, but with an unknown nature. She had developed

under other influences, other training, than theirs; and they were not sure of her. Besides, they were British to the backbone, and her foreign surroundings of the last three years had touched her manner and given her a certain air and pose and personal appearance which were not English. Hence, she was so far neither homelike nor admirable to people who held the faith that England is the only country where men are brave or women are pure, and that no man save an Englishman speaks the truth, loves God, or fears the devil. The daintiest little echo in her intonation, and the prettiest little way of saying "*Mille Graces!*" and "*Grazie tante*" for "thanks," brought the blemish of foreign influences prominently before them; and her love for Mrs Laver, who

had been her second mother as Nurse Wynter had been her sister's, was again another wedge that widened the original split.

Nevertheless, Rosalie was too sweet and ladylike, too pretty and amiable not to be loved, even against prejudice; and the Tiltons did love her, though they thought her foreign ways a pity. They would have loved her still more had she been alone; but by reason of old habit and longer growth Blanche stood nearest to them, and when obliged to take sides they did not take the new-comer's. If they possibly could, without flagrant injustice, they gave reason to their own, and let Rosalie bear more than her full share of the blame.

Nurse Wynter had no restraining "if" to hamper her. Right or wrong, she went

with "her own child," as she called Blanche for a somewhat spiteful distinction; for had not Rosalie been also hers in the years gone by, and when the parents of both were living.

The only person who was absolutely impartial was Jasper; and it was just this impartiality that did all the mischief and made Blanche so unpleasant and Nurse Wynter so unjust. Had he been against Rosalie, a very much milder measure of condemnation from the rest would have been sufficient; but as things were—when did jealousy ever trouble itself about truth or justice, or look to the nice adjustment of its cruel scales? It was enough that, before Rosalie came home, Blanche should have fancied herself most entirely beloved by Jasper; and that now she should see his

interest fairly divided between them both, to account for any amount of jealousy and wicked temper from the distressed girl and her devoted champion; and also to give cause for all that had happened.

Among other things to be done on Rosalie's coming of age, the division of the mother's jewellery was one of those which came first. To the young creatures themselves it was the most important, and even in a business point of view it was a thing of no mean consequence. The parents had been rich, and the girls were well provided for; but the jewellery of the mother would have been a fair dower had there been no other, and had the jewels been realised. They were kept in a large, strong, brass-bound box, more like a little chest than a jewel-box, with a lock of which the boast

was that no locksmith extant could pick it, and which, wanting its own peculiar key, nothing but smashing the whole thing to bits would give you the contents.

Because the sisters were less than cordial together, and because both Blanche and Nurse Wynter were on the keen look-out for any cause that should put Rosalie in the wrong, it was agreed that a skilled appraiser should divide the jewels into alternate portions of equal value. Then the girls might choose, turn and turn about, so as to give each the opportunity of taking what she liked best as the division went on. Rosalie, as the elder sister, was of course to have the first choice. Meanwhile the box and its key were given into the keeping of this elder sister, as a recognition of her majority and a kind of investment

of her rights. That this might be done in full solemnity, the jewel-box was brought downstairs, so that the transfer might be made in public, and the case handed over with all requisite formality from the care of the guardian to that of the ward and part owner. And to make the thing yet more sure in every way, the box was opened and its contents verified by the assembled family.

Everything was costly and everything was beautiful: but the most beautiful of all were the three necklaces of about equal value. One was of diamonds and sapphires, one of diamonds and opals, and the third was a string of very fine pearls. The pearls were indeed fit for a queen. Perfectly matched in size, colour and quality, they were all that pearls should

or could be. Mr Hetherington had been about fifteen years in collecting the row, which, as it stood, was absolutely perfect; and the possessor might hold herself blessed, so far as oysters can bestow a blessing on woman.

Unbalanced by anything of equal value —for the diamonds "saw each other," as Mr Tilton phrased it—these pearls threatened to prove a *crux* in the division, and owing to the bad terms on which the girls were together, the *crux* might be an awkward one.

"Mamma gave these to me," said Blanche, suddenly, taking up the pearls. "They are mine already — yes, they are, Rosalie!—and ought not to go into the division."

"Blanche!" remonstrated Rosalie, look-

ing at her sister in astonishment. "What an idea!"

"She did!" said Blanche, her fair face flushing as she spoke, and her bright blue eyes growing dangerously dark. "I remember quite well, one evening when she was going out to dinner, she put these pearls round my neck and said that some day they would be my own. It will be a horrid shame if they are put into the division when they really belong to me."

"I don't see that you have any claim to them, I must say," returned Rosalie.

"Tut, tut, Blanchey," said Mr Tilton, good-humouredly. "Such a deed of conveyance as that would hardly hold good in law! The pearls are too valuable to be given to one without compensation to the other. We must have them fairly

balanced by other things. The diamonds see each other as I have just said, but these must form a lot apart, and be well paid for in bracelets and the like."

"It is not fair, Guardy!" said Blanche, tears coming into her eyes. "Rosalie has much more jewellery than I have as it is, and I ought to have these pearls!"

"But, Blanche, this is the first I have ever heard of the gift!" said Rosalie. Her face, which was naturally paler than her sister's, had flushed too, and her beautiful eyes were looking moist and troubled.

"Mammy! don't you think I ought to have them when mamma gave them to me?" said Blanche, appealing to Mrs Tilton.

The good, soft, motherly soul was a little perplexed.

"I daresay Rosalie will let you have them, dear," she said, in her short-breathed way, temporising, as she always did. "They will suit you better than her."

"She has no right to let me have them," said Blanche, petulantly. "They are mine, and she will cheat me if she takes them. They ought not to be counted in the division at all, any more than this," touching the locket worn round her neck.

"But it has come upon me with such a surprise," said Rosalie. "I never heard a word about it before; and when papa spoke to me about the jewellery, and said he wished me to have his watch and mamma's wedding-ring, he did not tell me anything about the pearls for you. On the contrary," she added, her cheeks, which had been until then vivid crimson, suddenly paling to a deathly white,

"he said that he wanted me to have them, as I was the eldest daughter."

"Rosalie! what an abominable falsehood!" cried Blanche, rising in passionate indignation. "You say this just to prevent me having them. It is a wicked, made-up story!"

"I knew that you would say so; but it is the truth," said Rosalie, solemnly. "I do not tell stories, Blanche, and I do not believe that you do either; but between the two, papa's words were the most of a gift."

"My dear! it is a pity *you* did not say this before. If Blanche ought to have spoken —she who had only a childish remembrance to tell of—you, to whom your father made a solemn bequest, ought surely to have declared it!"

Mrs Tilton said this in a hesitating, half-pitiful, half-remonstrating vein, while Nurse

Wynter, who had been admitted as witness to the show, said in an audible whisper over their heads,—

"Miss Blanche is quite right. I would take my oath Mr Hetherington never said nothing of the kind. Miss Rosalie made it up just to spite the poor dear lamb."

"Enough! enough!" said Mr Tilton. "That chapter is closed; now let us pass on to another. When the jewels are divided it will then be time enough to fight over the spoils. Meanwhile, lay the beautiful and unconscious *casus belli* in its proper division, and hand me over that gold bracelet by you, Blanchey. This is a fine bit of goldsmith's skill, if you like!"

The hint was taken, and the pearls were laid aside in their own special compartment; while rings and bracelets, lockets

and brooches were passed from hand to hand to be commented on and admired; and then the whole were restored to the box, and the key handed with a great deal of ceremony to Rosalie.

"Hold on to it like grim death!" said Mr Tilton, laughing; "and, above all, take care of the pearls."

"There was need to tell her that, Guardy!" said Blanche, with a naughty toss of her wilful little golden head. "The danger is of her taking too much care."

"For shame, Blanche," said Rosalie, with a natural flash of indignation; while Jasper, with a very constrained manner and a very forced smile, said in a voice that was certainly harsher than was his in general,—

"Hold hard, Blanche! Who has taught you to think your sister dishonourable?"

"I know her and you do not," said Blanche, impetuously; then, almost in tears, she added, "but you always take Rosalie's part, Jasper! Since she came here"—Blanche could not force herself to say "came home"—"you have not been the same to me at all. I can do nothing right now!"

"Tut, tut, lassie; no quarrelling with Jasper," said Mr Tilton, again; while the young fellow himself laughed with just a shade of embarrassment as he answered,—

"That is nonsense, Blanche! I am exactly the same as I ever was; but," he added gravely, "I dislike injustice; and this kind of wild accusation, without proof or reason, is so horribly unjust."

"Thank you, Jasper," said Rosalie, raising her eyes to him with a grateful look.

And Jasper thought that his professional career would be the most glorious thing in the world if he were to be rewarded by all his clients as Rosalie's eyes rewarded him at this moment.

"Now, Rosalie, you are responsible," said Mr Tilton, as he handed her the key; and Rosalie, with a heightened colour, said, "Yes, I will take good care of my trust;" and looked as she felt—proud of her position as the recognised guardian of the jewels.

To make doubly sure of these precious treasures she fastened the key to a small elastic string which she then put round her neck. Surely if any contrivance against girlish thoughtlessness might be considered absolutely safe, this might! So much was she impressed with the necessity of care that even when she went to bed she did

not part with the key, but kept it still round her neck, as if she had been in a strange hotel, where the doors would not lock, and soft-footed thieves paced the passages at night.

When Nurse Wynter went in to ask if she could do anything to help her—which, by the way, was a great stretch of courtesy on the part of the cross old woman—she found the pretty creature standing in the middle of the room in her short, white girlish nightgown, with all her magnificent hair streaming over her shoulders, and fighting with the elastic which she was torturing into extra knots that caught her hair and came undone as soon as tied.

"Well, I'm sure," said nurse, with a disdainful air, "one would think you were in a heathen land, Miss Rosalie, where you were

afraid of your life. Such ridiculousness I never saw! Do for goodness sake take that string off your neck! You'll be strangling yourself with it at night. What are you afraid of?—Mr Tilton or your sister, Miss Blanche!"

"I am not afraid of anyone, but the things are in my care, and I would rather wear it," said Rosalie.

"Not if I know it, at night, to choke yourself before you know where you are," said Nurse Wynter, going back on her old habit of command, and taking the string from the girl's neck.

And Rosalie, going back on her old habit of submission, pretty deeply engraved on her nature after her childhood reared under Nurse Wynter's rule—gave in without a struggle and let the old tyrant do as she liked.

"There, you see where I put it; and here you'll find it in the morning," nurse said, laying the key on the dressing-table. "And now, get into bed, miss, do! You'll catch your death of cold standing there and I want to tuck you up."

About a week after this the appraising jeweller came to the house, and the brass-bound oaken box was again brought down into the drawing-room to be opened and the contents divided. Rosalie had the key always round her neck.

They were assembled; the guardians to see fair play; the girls to receive their inheritance; Nurse Wynter as one almost as much interested in the matter as themselves; Jasper as the spectator of a little act in a family drama. Rosalie took the string off her neck and herself unlocked the

box. She was very pale; the solemnity of the whole thing a little awed her, and she was sensitive by nature. Blanche was flushed, as was her manner when moved; she was even somewhat out of breath, as if she had been running, and with a strange uneasy look altogether.

"Now for the battle royal!" said Mr Tilton, jocosely, as the lid was raised and the first tray lifted out.

This was the tray where the three famous necklaces were kept.

As they took off the covering of cotton wool a cry broke from each spectator; the diamonds were safe, but the pearls were gone!

"Where are they, Rosalie?" asked Mr Tilton, gravely.

The girl had risen, as, indeed, had Blanche,

when the box was opened and the loss discovered.

"I do not know," she answered, with a white, scared face, and in a terrified whisper. "I have never opened the box since it was here before."

"But you have the key, child?"

"Yes."

"And you have worn it always, so that no one else has been able to have possession of it?"

"Always except at night," she answered, turning suddenly to Nurse Wynter.

"I don't see that makes much difference. We are not thieves here," said the old woman, in a defiant kind of voice.

"Now," said Blanche, in an excited way to Jasper; "I told you how it would be, and you see I was right. I wouldn't have given her the key!"

"What do you mean?" asked Jasper, sternly. "Do you mean to insinuate that Rosalie has taken the pearls?"

"Who else could?" cried Blanche. "Who else had the key? They couldn't go without hands, Jasper. Someone must have done it, and who else could?"

"I know nothing about that—neither who could nor did," he answered. "What I do know is, that Rosalie did not take them, and does not know where they are."

"Jasper! how unjust you are!" exclaimed Blanche, hysterically. "You would defend Rosalie if she committed murder, and make out that I did it!"

"Certainly, I would defend her if someone else had committed murder and she were accused of it," he answered slowly,

fixing his eyes on Blanche with a penetrating and rather hard expression.

Blanche turned on him fiercely.

"What do you mean?" she said.

"What I say," he answered. "Rosalie knows nothing about these pearls, whoever else may. They have not been taken or made away with by her."

"I suppose you mean by this that I have taken them?" she retorted passionately.

"I did not say so, I only said she has not," was his reply.

Blanche burst into tears, and flung herself into Nurse Wynter's arms.

"It is too horrid," she sobbed. "First to be robbed and then insulted—it is too bad!"

"Perhaps it is worse for your sister," said Jasper. "She has been first robbed and

then accused. Your insult is only that I refuse to believe her guilty."

"This must be looked into," said Mr Tilton, rising, and speaking in a loud voice. The conversation between Blanche and his son had been carried on in undertones, so that no one had heard what was being said, and her burst of tears on Nurse Wynter's breast was too natural to call for remark. "The pearls have been taken in my house," he continued, "and I feel so far responsible for the discovery of the thief. I forbid anyone to leave the house, or those who are in this room to stir, until a thorough search has been made. We are all under suspicion alike, and my things and my wife's will be searched with the rest."

"They may look as long as they like,"

said old Nurse Wynter, grimly. "They as took the pearls have not been so simple as to leave them lying about among the dusters. If Miss Rosalie had them out she has made away with them long before this. There are ways and means at all street corners."

"You shameful, wicked woman!" cried Rosalie, firing up into sudden wrath. "I believe you took them yourself when you made me put off the key that night. It was the only night that I did put it off."

But the words brought such a storm about her, from all save Jasper, who only watched the old woman, that she was obliged to retract them and even beg Nurse Wynter's pardon for her passionate speech and terrible accusation.

No search, though made by the quickest

and cleverest detective to be supplied by Scotland Yard, revealed the faintest trace of the theft or the thief. The pearls had been and were not; and no one could say less or prove more. The key had never left Rosalie's possession; and it seemed incredible that anyone should have ventured to steal into her room in the night, running the chance of detection and eternal shame had the girl awakened; yet it also seemed just as incredible that she herself should have dared to abstract the pearls after the attention that had been called to them, and the dispute of which they had been the occasion and the groundwork. It would seem as if she, a mere girl, could never have found courage for such a daring thing as this robbery would have been; and even, had she been bold enough to have

ventured it, surely she would have had too much good sense and foresight, knowing, as she did, that she would be suspected first of all, and that a strict inquiry would be made. Besides, where had she placed them? All the pawnbrokers' shops in London were visited; the jewellers were interrogated; even Mrs Laver did not escape suspicion and examination; but failure in finding did not make the mystery any the less mysterious; and turn to any side one would, the veil of darkness was impenetrable.

The division had to be made without the pearls, and Blanche wept and bemoaned herself as much as if she had been suddenly despoiled of her fortune or deprived of her beauty—which would have been worse. To comfort her, she got more than her rightful share of the jewels; but

she took her sister's generosity as a make-up and a blind, and scorned to be grateful, she said, for what was only her just due.

For Rosalie herself, she had to live under the weight of a suspicion that was never wholly lifted from her young shoulders. The only people that maintained her perfect innocence were Jasper, Mrs Laver, and the detective. Mr Tilton doubted and feared, and Mrs Tilton felt sick, she said, when she thought of it; while Blanche and Nurse Wynter openly accused her, and would take no denial. They went round and round about that one central point: "If she did not, who could? She had the key, and who else could have got at them?"

And as no one answered them, their reasonings were so far triumphant. It was a dreadful thing all round; but many

dreadful things happen in this criss-cross life of ours; and if we did justice to each other, what need would there be of policemen and courts of law?

One pleasant thing for Rosalie grew out of this painful matter, and that was Jasper's advocacy, which, as time went on, became something more and more pronounced. After the first burst of passion against Nurse Wynter, the girl bore herself so well in what was such a terribly trying position—she had so much dignity and quietness, so much of the patience of innocence, the long-suffering of magnanimity, that Jasper, judging of the whole nature from this one evidence, passed from admiration to esteem, and from esteem to love; and one day he asked her if she would accept what was perhaps worth more than

even a lost string of pearls—his heart, his life, his hand, his love!

He was fairly successful at the Bar for so young a beginner; Rosalie's fortune would enlarge the borders considerably; and when his father died he would have an income of his own, independent of his profession, that would make them more and more at ease.

The whole thing was as well fitting as a Chinese puzzle; but both his father and mother hesitated for some days before they would say they approved the marriage, or would receive Rosalie as their daughter. There was also that ugly story of the pearls standing on the black board against her, and pretty, coaxing, foolish little Blanche was their favourite. But love and Jasper conquered at last, and they said,

"Well, if Rosalie said yes, they would not say no."

That "yes," which was as certain as to-morrow's sun, cost Blanche more tears in secret than she would have liked to shed in public; and not even Nurse Wynter could console her.

"Rosalie has always robbed me," she said with unreasoning bitterness. "Mamma made a pet of her and papa an eldest daughter; she stole the pearls which were mine, and now she has taken Jasper from me. If she had not come back to England when she did, Jasper would have gone on liking me, and I should have been his wife, not Rosalie. I know that he was in love with me before she came back. He almost said that he was, and I am sure he tried to make me believe so. But

this horrid, wicked girl came, and then the whole thing went wrong. She bewitched away Jasper from me; made him think her innocent about the pearls; and now she has taken him altogether and broke my heart."

This was poor Blanche's secret moan; and she poured out accusations and reproaches against her sister, till even Nurse Wynter thought her too hard, and wished she could find a spell that would turn her darling's tears to smiles, and her bitter hatred at least to indifference, if not to love.

The girl's despair was to no purpose. The engagement went on, and finally culminated in that fatal marriage ceremony which makes those two words, "I will," a fact as binding as life itself—a tie to be broken only by death; and Blanche had to wear the willow

while her sister took the orange blossoms that she had once believed would fall into her own lap.

But still the secret of the lost pearls remained undiscovered, and no ingenuity could find a trace of their past history or present habitat. Rosalie left off speculating about them—certainly, she left off fretting or regretting. She was divinely happy in her marriage; and when the "triangle" was complete, and she held her baby in her arms, she wondered how she had ever cared for any necklace whatever besides those sweet clasping arms, any jewel on her neck save those soft, pink, straying hands. How willingly now she would have given Blanche the pearls, and all else that had come to her share out of that brass-bound oaken box, if only she might have kept her

husband and her child!—sure of their love as they were of her devotion.

A few years after this it came to be pretty Blanche's turn to be a bride. She was married on the day when she was twenty-one, and she was to sail for India the day after. While they were putting the last touches to her dress—Rosalie, Mrs Tilton, old Nurse Wynter and some others in the room—a small parcel was brought to the house by the dustman. It was addressed to Miss Blanche Hetherington, and the writing was evidently in a feigned hand. Nurse Wynter took the parcel from the servant a little hurriedly, and herself gave it to Blanche, saying, as she did so,—

"I hope it is some pretty present, my dearie, to bring you good luck on your wedding-day."

Blanche opened the packet with a half-

frightened, half-impatient look; Rosalie and Mrs Tilton drew close to her to see what it might be. As a bride she was the charge of all the women about her, and they had the right to be inquisitive and overseeing.

"Oh, nurse!" she said, as the box fell to the ground, while the pearl necklace so long lost and so oddly returned lay in her trembling hand.

Not a word accompanied the jewels—not a line to show who had sent them, nor whence they had come. It was just an ordinary parcel, sent through the post unregistered, like an everyday little box of samples; as if those all but priceless jewels had been of no more value than a packet of mignonette seeds. Conjecture might expend itself where it would; it could not hook itself on to proof.

As Nurse Wynter fastened the pearls round Blanche's throat she said in a voice loud enough for all to hear,—

"Providence does justly after all. Miss Blanche has her mother's gift at last."

"You will not take them away from me, Rosalie? Say you will not, Rosalie," said Blanche, going to her sister and putting her arms round her. "On my birthday; and when I am of age, and just going to India, too; and it is my wedding-day; and you are so much richer than we are!" she added, in short, breathless sentences.

"No," said Rosalie, who had become deadly pale; "the thing is past now, and I have lived down that cruel suspicion. Jasper never believed me guilty, so I do not care. As you have the pearls, keep them."

"You see it was not my fault, Rosalie, was

it?" said Blanche, in an anxious, excited, nervous way.

"Settle that with your own conscience," returned Rosalie, proudly—"you and Nurse Wynter. But you should not have accused *me.*"

Yet, after all, there was no proof that it was either Blanche or Nurse Wynter, or, if the latter, that the former knew. It might have been Mrs Tilton, anxious to please her pet; or it might have been one of the servants who had stolen for greed, but finding the theft more dangerous than profitable took this way of restoring it;—the butler had been dismissed for dishonesty about a year ago. The secret was kept to the last; and though the question was often asked, "Who was it?" no answer was ever given, and the veil continued impenetrable to the end.

MY CHARMING LODGER

To a young curate, not long from college, and accustomed to a home, that remote, fellside parsonage at Brigend was essentially exile, hard enough to bear, if not quite as bad as Siberia. I had no one on whom I could fall back as a companion. My sister was bound to remain at home with my mother; and she and I composed the family. For her own part, my mother was too delicate to undertake the long journey from London to the North, or to endure the roughness inseparable from such a place as Brigend when she got there. We were eight miles from a station, and the road we had to travel over was more like the dry bed of a river than a civilised highway which had once been maca-

damised, and was presumably still kept in repair by the ratepayers and occupiers.

Things being so, and the long autumn evenings daily deepening and lengthening, with the prospect of that dreary lonely winter before me, I determined to advertise for some young man to whom plain living and high thinking, with plenty of leisure and little to pay, would be powerful inducements to come—thus sharing while lightening my solitude, as well as halfing the very moderate expenses of my housekeeping. Moderate, however, as they were, my exiguous stipend could barely meet them; and a Co. in the weekly bills would be a gain.

I therefore put into the paper an advertisement for a paying companion, and in due course received a reply. As it was the only one I did receive I had no difficulty in making a choice, and was thus spared both

trouble and responsibility. After the interchange of a few letters, settling times and terms, the die was cast, and things were arranged, and Mr Montgomery Somerset was booked to come on the twenty-first of October —which day, pace the Thirteen Club, I well remember fell on a Friday. Meanwhile, I undertook to meet him at the station—with some difficulty securing a fly for his transit to the parsonage. The roads were so bad that few job-masters cared to send their cattle along them. Which fact added to the desolation of the place.

Unpunctual as usual, and a good half-hour late, the train drew up at the little Fellside Station which served this desolate tract of country. The one solitary first-class passenger alighted. I was pleasantly impressed by his appearance. Tall, good-looking, well-

dressed, he was also well-mannered—in a way—not wholly so, but quite passably. He was a trifle nervous, for I noticed how sharply he looked about him, and how rapid but eager the glances with which he scanned the carriages behind his own and the few loiterers on the platform. Even Bob Lant, the stolid old constable of the district, came in for a look which seemed to take him in from his helmet to his boots. Of the two I thought at the time that Mr Montgomery Somerset was more of a detective than our own local Sherlock Holmes, and more likely to track a criminal and hunt him down. Be that, however, as it may, in a short time we were both seated in the rattle-trap old shandrydan, which was all that Fellside had to offer, and jolting over the dry water course to the isolation of Brigend.

As the days passed by I had cause to congratulate myself on my good fortune; though indeed it was so good as to make me wonder how it ever came about. My lodger was simply charming, always good-humoured, complaisant, contented. He was not perhaps so well-educated as might have been expected, and knew less than an ordinary gentleman of classics, mathematics, and the rest of the subjects known as of course to educated men. In fact, he knew nothing at all of these things, and his reading was not above the average of a schoolboy's blundering pronunciation. He explained this by saying that he had never been sent to any good school—at least, not for long together. His father had been in the army; he was the only child; and parental love had got the better of parental foresight, for neither father

nor mother would part with him. Hence his education had been desultory—and he had learned nothing from the root upward, having forgotten, indeed, all that he had ever acquired. As he was anxious to know more than he did, his ignorance was not so much a barrier as a spur, and we passed the long evenings in study, which I strove to make as interesting and little irksome as I could.

Meanwhile, I was glad to see how, under the regular *régime* and brisk fellside air, my lodger's nervousness gradually subsided, and he became less watchful, more composed, and, as one might say, sleeker altogether than he had been when he came.

One thing struck me; Montgomery received no letters. He had been with me now for six weeks, and he had not had one single letter. He seemed to think I

must find this strange, for one day, when the bag had brought me two letters from home and others from friends, besides circulars and papers, he said, with a laugh, "Do you notice I never have a letter from anyone?"

"Yes," I answered frankly. "Why is it?"

"Shall I tell you?" he asked, a queer, quizzical kind of expression about his mouth, but his eyes were not quizzical. They were too searching, too anxious, to fit well with the "wreathed smile" about those thin and mobile lips.

"Certainly, yes; tell me. I see there is a story in it," I answered, laughing, too.

"A highly romantic story, you bet your bottom dollar on that!" he said. "I am a fugitive."

"Mercy!" I cried, startled. "A fugitive from what?—justice?"

"No; love!" he said.

I suppose I looked puzzled, for he went on to say, "An old woman—at least, she is old to me, as I am only thirty and she is past fifty. Well, this old woman, as I must call her, Lady Asplin, has done me the honour to take a fancy to my unworthy person. She has persecuted me for more than a year now, insisting on my taking her presents, on my accepting her hospitality, on my attaching myself to her service. I give you my word, I no more saw her little game, at the first, than I see now into the middle of next week. I took it all as the innocent maternal love of an old woman for a young man making his way in the world—a woman glad to be of use to one without too many friends, and sadly in need of bankers. And I accepted

all her kindnesses as I would have taken them from my own mother. When she could not give me money she loaded me with jewellery to turn into money. I have a small portmanteau full of jewels that she gave me. But I was never so hard up as to be forced to spout these treasures; and I kept them, meaning to give them back to her as she gave them to me, when I could truthfully tell her that I had established myself so far in my profession as to need no more help from the outside. Did I not tell you I was on the Stock Exchange? No? But I am. I am, for my business, a stockbroker. So things went on for about a year or more, when the lady's feelings either changed or became too strong to be concealed. From maternal affection—as I had thought—she passed to girlish coquetry

—to a young lady's arts and fascinations—and later to declared passion. She flung off the mask and made me a distinct offer. I was staying with her at the time, and I declare to you I was as innocent as a dove of her intentions, till she told me in plain language that she loved and wanted me to marry her. Then I was frightened. I confess it. I am the son of a soldier, and a brave one, too, but I was fairly frightened by a woman! In the middle of the night I made up my packets and stole out of her house—like a thief. When I saw your advertisement, I said to myself, 'That's the ticket for me!' I answered it and came down, as I say, literally a fugitive from a woman's love, and—I know the sex—her certain vengeance to come if she finds me out. So, Mr Waring, there's my

story, sir, complete in a nutshell; and I think you'll agree with me in saying a pretty queer one it is too, and fit to go into a three-volumed novel, if ever there was one."

"Why, yes, it is queer enough," I answered; "and I scarcely know what to say to it. It seems a pity that you should leave London and your business just for this. Why not pack up all these jewels you speak of, and send them back to the lady, saying you cannot keep them because you cannot marry her, and then go to work with your hands quite free? That's what I would do if I were in your place. I would not let myself be either frightened or banished for any old woman in the world."

He sighed.

"Ah! you don't know women as I do," he returned. "Nor have I told you quite

all. There is another woman in the case —Mary Edwardes, Lady Asplin's orphan niece, whom I love and who loves me. If I were to do this, she would turn poor Mary out of doors, and I do not know what would happen then! For the dear girl has no money, and she would be ruined. No, I dare not do that!"

I confess I did not see the logical consequence which seemed so clear to my charming lodger, but I supposed he knew his own business best, so did not urge my side of the question. It was evidently a danger, take it how one would, and too delicate a matter for the interference of a stranger.

But I did not like the idea of those jewels given in friendship and kept in estrangement. It seemed to me as if the very elements of honour demanded their

return; and for my own part I could not have slept another night with them in my possession had I been in Montgomery Somerset's place. To him, however, this seemed not only to be Quixotism, but even actually criminal, in view of Mary Edwardes and that curious *non sequitur*—her probable dismissal from the house should they be returned.

This story perplexed me a great deal. There were features in it I did not like, and it puzzled me how to make it hang together. And more than all, it seemed to take away a certain portion of the reliance I had had on my Charming Lodger—to rub off some of the glamour which he had thrown over me. Well-mannered he was, certainly, but I saw for the first time a certain artificiality in his good

breeding, as if it had been an art acquired and not inherited—a certain dash of obsequiousness in his complaisance which hitherto I had taken simply as good-temper and quasi-carelessness. I remembered his restlessness, his watchful anxiety when he first came, and those eager glances scanning the small world on the platform when he arrived—restlessness and anxiety which I had put down to the over-strain of London life and the nervousness resulting. But now I scarce knew what to think. The story, as he told it, did not explain things to my satisfaction, and this lessened glamour gave me a clearer insight. But I was in a cleft stick, and without grounds for hostile action had I had even the wish to take it.

It was in the bitterest time of the

winter months when Montgomery one day said to me quite suddenly, "I must go over to Lancaster to-morrow."

"You'll have a cold drive," I said.

He could not ride, so I knew he would not ask for my pony.

"How can I get a trap?" he asked.

"Oh! I'll manage that," I answered; "and I'll come with you for the sake of the outing."

I thought he looked disturbed at this, but I had an uneasy feeling about this trip. I did not want to lose sight of my Charming Lodger, who, by this time, owed me for nearly three months' board and lodging, and—I wanted to see the end of the drama.

"But I mean to stop a few days," he said.

"Do you? Well, I can come back before you," I continued. "At all events,

the jaunt will not be unpleasant even in this bitter weather, and we shall enjoy it better together."

"All right," said Montgomery, in a tone that suggested it was all wrong.

I got the trap, and we set out over the rough road, which the winter rains and storms had made worse than before. We were a little behindhand to start with. Montgomery had taken an unconscionable time to dress, and by his bulky appearance had stuffed all he possessed into his pockets. This delay lost us our train, and when we got to the station there was nothing for us but blankness and disappointment. There were but two trains out in the day — this at noon which we had lost — and one at four, to catch the up-mail train at Lancaster.

"What shall we do?" I said, when our fiasco was made apparent.

To my surprise and indignation my lodger's only reply was a torrent of about the foulest oaths I had ever heard from human lips.

"Swearing won't help us," I said gravely, "and please remember I am a clergyman."

Montgomery seemed to pull himself together upon this, and made an apology of a sort.

"Let us go for a drink to the pub.," he said.

"All right," I answered. "You have your drink, and I'll have some tea."

We turned up to the little village where the "Wheatsheaf" held out all manner of promises of good cheer for man and beast. In the bar-parlour we found among others old Bob Lant, lounging about as usual. As we entered and gave our orders—Mont-

gomery for his brandy and for my tea—I saw the old fellow's eyes fixed on my companion with an anxious scrutiny. After a minute he went out, and I could see, through a small pane let into the door, what Montgomery could not—the old constable alternately reading a sheet of paper and looking at Montgomery.

Then he went into the street, and I watched him go into the post-office, which was also a telegraph office.

Was there any connection between this and his scrutiny of my lodger?

We were lingering about the place, Montgomery resolute to go to Lancaster by the four o'clock train, and I as resolute to wait at Fellside with him — I thought to his chagrin — when the noise of an engine panting into the station was heard.

It was at an entirely uncovenanted hour, and it meant a special. It meant something more; for presently two policemen walked up the cobble-paved street and turned into the "Wheatsheaf," accompanied by Bob Lant. My lodger and I had gone back there for shelter from the rain, which was falling steadily.

When they entered I saw Montgomery start, turn white, and, as it were, cower. The elder of the two came up to him, and tapped him on the shoulders.

"I arrest you in the Queen's name," he said, "for stealing Lady Asplin's jewels."

"Stealing!" I cried, and I knew that I was as white as my friend, my Charming Lodger.

"Yes," said the man, stolidly. "This man, Jim Brown, was Lady Asplin's confidential butler, and made off with her

jewels on the twentieth of October last. Since then we've missed him, and only to-day come up with him. But now he's safe," he added, clicking the bracelets sharp and firm.

So I had taken to my home as an equal and a man of honour a clever and unprincipled thief, and confounded the superficial "gentility" of a sharp butler's quick study with the gentlehood of one of the purple-born. It was a lesson never to be forgotten nor repeated. Since then I have elected to bear my solitude uncompanioned, and to give myself away no more to lodgers, charming or otherwise. For the bargain was a bad one; and I lost by the arrangement all round.

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